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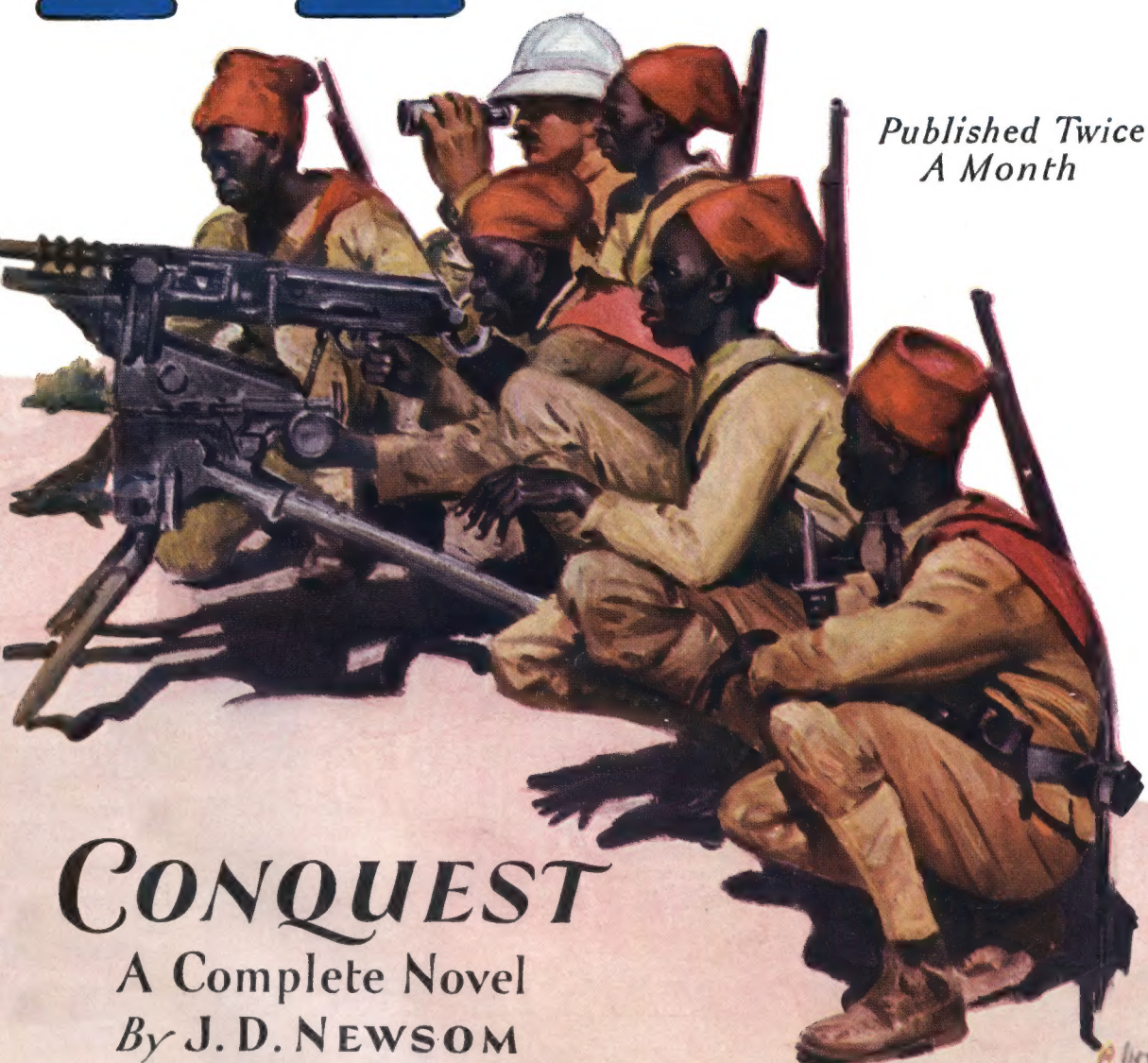

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The author of "The Cure" and "Too Tough to Kill" gives us a complete novel of the French Foreign Legion in the sun blasted wastes of Morocco

By J. D. NEWSOM

"THERE is a species of a cow of a Beni-Yaffara trying to knock the door down. He says his name is Ahmed Zogwar and he wants to see the captain. Does Monsieur the Captain want to see him?"

Belali, the Senegalese orderly, had to repeat the question four times before he succeeded in attracting Captain Emile Langevin's attention.

The captain was shoveling boiled goat's meat and rice into his mouth with one hand while, with the other, he turned the pages of a book. The food he ate did not interest him much; he had been eating the same insipid fare for months on end. For dessert there was raspberry jam in a glass jar festooned with flies, some long dead and limp, others buzzing desperately as they struggled against the sticky quicksands which had entrapped them.

Langevin looked up at last. He threatened the orderly with a hunk of stringy goat's meat impaled on the tines of his fork.

"Have you ever tried to read Mallarmé?" he inquired. "On a hot day these symbolists drive me crazy. Listen to this, Belali, and digest it if you can. It purports to describe Cleopatra's precipitate flight with Anthony. At least that's how I figure it out: 'Purple sails against a red sunset . . .'"

"It's Ahmed Zogwar," persisted Belali. "He'll have the door off its hinges if Monsieur the Captain doesn't speak to him."

CONQUEST

"Who did you say was outside?" Langevin demanded.

Belali repeated his statement for the sixth time. The banging on the front door grew louder than ever. The small house boomed like a drum.

"Wonders will never cease, that's all there is to it," commented Langevin, drawing a sharp breath. "Belali, faithful servitor, you behold your master positively dumbfounded."

Belali believed nothing of the sort. He knew his master much too well. Langevin was not an emotional creature. In fact he was about as emotional as a fish. He had lived in close contact with the natives of North Africa for so many years that he had acquired something more than their own sphinx-like impenetrability.

At first glance, however, he might have been mistaken for a mild mannered schoolmaster. He was rather bald, rather stout, rather short. Overexertion made him wheeze asthmatically. A network of mi-

nute, bright red blood vessels covered his plump cheeks and his nose. He wore gold rimmed spectacles on a thin gold chain clipped behind his left ear. He had a nice, slow, benevolent smile which never reached his eyes; pale blue eyes as hard as steel.

His uniforms would have caused a riot in any self-respecting garrison. He dressed regardless of regulations in a white tunic held together with safety pins, baggy native trousers with a seat which reached to his calves, and red leather boots. Over this startling ensemble he draped a black Kabyle *burnous*.

The nearest garrison, fortunately, was thirty kilometers away as the crow flies, and his visitors were few and far between. Ain-Hareb, where he made his headquarters, was not a health resort patronized by generals and other important personages. They were quite content to leave him to his own devices as long as nothing went wrong. When anything displeased them they wrote him sharply worded letters, which he fed to Alexander, his milk goat, a lady with an irascible temper.

He lived alone in a small pill box of a blockhouse on the outskirts of Ain-Hareb, a stone walled village overlooking a barren, sun blasted valley imprisoned between great red cliffs gashed with purple shadows. In front of him in the high hills there were whole flocks of warlike clans which refused, gun in hand, to have anything to do with the sultan the French had installed at Rabat, with the French themselves, or with Western European civilization in general. Behind Langevin, in the lowlands, the French army stood ready, gun in hand, to carry forward the torch of peace and progress. In between the devil and the deep sea squatted Captain Emile Langevin, performing astounding feats of diplomacy and intrigue.

Officially he was known as a liaison officer attached to the Information Service of the Bureau of Native Affairs—the French are nothing if not thorough in their definitions. His job was simplicity itself; all he had to do was to placate the rebellious tribes and pave the way for their eventual submission.

To avoid arousing the antagonism of the natives he worked single handed, soothing, nursing, bluffing, playing off family against family, clan against clan, bribing some, threatening others, groping out always for new converts to the French cause, ferreting out the weak links in the chain.

It was a hair raising job. His predecessor had been disembowled and had had his tongue cut out for good measure—a fact which did not disturb Langevin's peace of mind. Nothing disturbed him. He slept soundly, played solitaire, read prodigiously and went about his work with the industry of an ant. He was too much of a fatalist to bother about his ultimate end. Had he done so he would have cracked up and gone to pieces. Ain-Hareb was no place for a sensitive, highly strung man.

HE HAD a hundred difficult problems to solve each day, but headquarters was never satisfied. The powers that be were forever clamoring for results, and more results: Tangible Results! They acted as though Langevin was in duty bound to pacify the entire Tafilalet range and hand it over done up in pink ribbon to the colonel commanding the territory. The colonel, a new man by the name of Tergnier, was trying to make a pest of himself. Langevin had never seen him, but he heard from him by every mail. These communications written in an abrupt, soldierly manner never failed to tickle Langevin's peculiar sense of humor. The colonel, a man of high moral principles, objected to everything his subordinate did; he objected to subsidies, he objected to bribes, and he could not understand why Langevin did not punish notorious malefactors—still uncaught—with a "just but ruthless hand".

Headquarters, however, was the least of Langevin's troubles. The zone which he controlled was inhabited by the Beni-Yaffara, a group of flea bitten, down-at-heel, demoralized clans. Until Langevin

took them in hand they had never known the meaning of security. They raised scraggy goats, a little millet and some apricots. If their warlike neighbors forgot to raid them they had nearly enough food to keep them alive; if they were raided they starved or sold off their womenfolk. They were not a happy people. They had neither decency, nor self-respect, nor honor. Their morals were the morals of jackals.

They were loyal to Langevin because he had recruited a corps of irregular cavalry among them and paid good wages which enabled them, for the first time in generations, to defend their crops and to keep their families from dying of hunger. It was such a novel situation that they had grown almost truculent, but Langevin realized quite clearly that there was no telling from one day to the next whether they would fight for or against him. Everything depended upon his ability to scare them more than they were scared of the hill tribes. The subsidies he paid his irregulars played a large part, no doubt, in determining their future actions, nevertheless they had to be handled with kid gloves, for they were a credulous, superstitious people who could be swayed by the craziest promises as well as by good silver dourous.

Of all these people the trickiest and by far and away the most dangerous were those belonging to Ahmed Zogwar's clan. They were born traitors and liars as other men are born with red hair or buck teeth. They sat on the political fence, paying lip service to the French while they smuggled rifles to the rebels and sent their young men to join in raids on the rich villages of the Mahgreb. Langevin had the best of reasons to believe that they had murdered his predecessor, but he was careful to keep his thoughts to himself.

Extermination, which seemed to be the only satisfactory way of dealing with such vermin, was out of the question. Their village, perched on a ledge of rock hanging sheer above the Bou-Fathoum Pass, was impregnable. It would have taken a full division, complete with artillery, to dislodge them—and the first threat of reprisals would inevitably bring about the uprising of every clan in the district.

Langevin had done his best to win them over. He had enlisted their warriors in his corps of cavalry, and they had rewarded him by selling their weapons to the insurgents or by using government ammunition to settle their private feuds. The turncoats could never be found, although the captain knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were tending their goats and sowing their millet within a stone's throw of their village.

With Ahmed Zogwar his relations had always been pleasant, even friendly, but the chieftain, who was not devoid of brains, had steadfastly refused to come anywhere near the vicinity of Ain-Hareb. He judged Langevin by his own standards and trusted him not at all.

And now, without warning, Ahmed had popped up in the enemy's camp and was pounding furiously on the blockhouse door, demanding admission.

Despite his unperturbed manner Langevin was genuinely surprised at this development. After listening intently for some moments to the volley of blows, he looked up at Belali, who was fidgeting on the threshold.

"Did you happen to notice whether our caller was alone?" he inquired. "An ambush, faithful servitor, might conceivably have disastrous consequences for you as well as for me."

"He's all alone, Monsieur the Captain," grumbled Belali. "Him and a mule. That's all. Plain is empty. He hasn't even got a gun."

"Then the best thing you can do is to let him in before he tears down the whole shanty," Langevin decided. "Don't snarl at him. Ahmed Zogwar is an important visitor. You will be good enough to receive him as graciously as you know how, which isn't saying much."

Seconds later Ahmed Zogwar marched into the room. He was a tall, stringy man dressed in a dilapidated *djellaba* of gray wool which fell to his knees. His long shanks, as lean as pipe stems, were crusted

with whitish dust. In appearance he reminded Langevin of a vicious camel. His lower lip was thick and pendulous, and his eyes had the camel's bulging, glassy stare. A scanty black beard sprouted in tufts on his cheeks and chin. And yet, ugly though he was, he was not without a certain amount of poise and dignity.

"*Asselama!*" he said, carrying his fingertips to his lips and forehead. "Allah's greeting be with you, O Fount of all Wisdom!"

"Peace be with you, Leader of Hosts," responded Langevin, straightening his spectacles on his perspiring nose and giving the native a quick glance of appraisal.

The customary formalities having been disposed of, he waved the "Leader of Hosts" to a carpet over by the wall.

"Sit," he urged. "You have ridden fast and it is noon. Tea will be ready in just a moment, if Belali has not gone on strike."

But Ahmed was too restless to sit down and drink mint flavored tea. His face, Langevin saw, was gray and drawn and in his eyes there was a hunted, frightened look.

HE WENT straight to the point. His only son, a boy of twelve, was dying. He had been taken with terrible pains in the belly four days earlier and had gone steadily from bad to worse. Every known remedy had been tried. The boy had been made to chew and swallow bits of paper inscribed with verses from the Koran, a holy man had sacrificed a goat in the prescribed manner and had sprinkled the warm blood on the child with the necessary incantations, prayers had been said at the shrine of Sidi-abd-el-Djitalli—all with no result. The boy was dying of a great pain in his belly.

As a last resort Ahmed had bethought himself of Langevin. One of the captain's hobbies was medicine, and this hobby had done more for the cause of France in the Beni-Yaffara zone than half a dozen machine guns could have done. Slowly, with parrot-like enunciation, Ahmed recalled case after case: a compound fracture of the arm, a bullet wound through the lungs, a woman nursed back to health after having been stabbed in the back, scores of cases of typhoid and dysentery . . .

"And now," he concluded, "you must save my boy. Aye," he added hastily, "I know—we have broken the faith, we have done this and that, for we are weak and ungovernable. You have small trust in us—but my son is dying. Save him, Sidi Capitaine! Save him and as Allah is my witness, I swear by my father's beard, that every man of my clan henceforth shall be as thy slave. I hold them—" he held up his clenched fist—"like this! When I give an order, that order is obeyed. Ninety rifles, Sidi Capitaine, for the life of a child. Ninety yours for the taking if you give me back my son."

For a long moment Langevin sat motionless, his hands clasped across his ample stomach. He stared up at the ceiling where the blue smoke from Belali's wood fire trailed out in long wisps, floating toward the loophole.

Ahmed's story sounded fishy. It was a bit too good to be true. Ahmed, quite possibly, was being paid to decoy him. They had killed Tacheron, they might be planning to kill him too. On the other hand, if the boy were really sick, if he could be cured, if Ahmed meant what he said—All these *ifs* would mean the end of a long silent struggle, the pushing forward of the frontiers by a dozen miles, the closing of another pass to the insurgents. If, if, if! There was no end to the list of *ifs* Langevin turned over in his mind.

Abruptly he reached a decision. It was worth the risk. He was not indispensable. There were other and better men in the army to carry on his work if . . .

"*C'est bon*," he told the native. "All right. We leave at once."

"Sidi—" Ahmed began, but Langevin cut him short.

"I want no thanks. I expect nothing. I am going with you for the sake of the boy who is suffering. Perhaps I can help him—perhaps not. Later on, if you want to, you can make good your oath—or break it, just as you see fit." He shrugged

his shoulders and a twinkle gleamed for an instant in his pale eyes. "I'm used to that sort of thing," he explained. "I lost most of my illusions long ago."

"May my life be forfeit—"

"*Tchk!* Not another word." Wheezing, he hoisted himself out of his chair and tapped Ahmed's scrawny chest with his knuckles. "I'm much more interested at present in my own existence. Between you and me, O Rogue with the Smooth Tongue, I would not give two sous for my future prospects once I reach the outskirts of your village. I have a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach which leads me to believe that I am afraid."

Methodically he went about the room collecting the things he needed—a couple of dog-eared textbooks, a tin box containing a surgical kit and drugs, a pipe, a rubber tobacco pouch and a battered *képi* with tarnished gold braid.

Belali, scowling darkly at the Arab, brought in his master's belt to which a revolver holster was attached, but Langevin shook his head.

"Keep it," he ordered. "I'm not going to clutter myself up with unnecessary junk. It's much too hot. If Ahmed wants to kill me he'll do it whether or not I have a gun. Isn't that so, Ahmed? A revolver wouldn't be of much use to me up your way in case of—er—trouble, would it?

"My boy is dying," retorted the native, staring straight into Langevin's eyes. "If any one of my people should raise a finger against thee I should feed his bowels to the dogs. Take thy gun, or leave it behind; with me thou art safe."

Langevin slung his black *burnous* over his shoulders and led the way out of doors. The blast of the midday sun struck full in his face like a metal mask. A torrent of blinding white light smote the earth, and the hills were warped all askew by the shimmering waves of heat.

Side by side, Langevin on his pot bellied mare, Ahmed on his rangy mule, they rode up the valley toward the Bou-Fathoum Pass. They did not exchange a dozen words from first to last. The dust muffled the sound of the unshod hoofs, and an oppressive silence weighed down upon the desolate land imprisoned between high red cliffs.

Sweat gathering inside the leather lining of Langevin's *képi* cascaded down his cheeks. Before it reached his beard it evaporated. His glasses were so crusted with steam and finely powdered dust that he could not have detected the presence of an enemy fifty yards away. He did not attempt to do so. Having decided upon a certain line of conduct, he dismissed the whole affair from his mind and whiled away the time trying to remember in detail Chapter III of Bergson's "Creative Evolution".

AT LAST the trail left the floor of the valley and climbed in dizzy zigzags up a gully in the flank of the cliff. The slope was so steep that Ahmed's mule, digging for a foothold in the sun baked earth, showered Langevin with pebbles. To spare his horse he dismounted, looped the bridle over his arm and toiled along on foot. By the time he reached the rocky ledge where the village stood he was puffing, panting, gurgling and sweating at every pore.

The clansmen had spied him miles away. He tottered toward the gateway between a double row of sullen, watchful natives, many of whom carried stolen Lebel rifles in the crooks of their brown arms.

Ahmed gave a low voiced command. A man stepped forward and took charge of Langevin's horse, another one slung the saddle bags over his shoulder.

Langevin tapped the ashes out of his pipe and slid it into his pocket. He took one last blear eyed look at the jumbled, glaring hills.

"Nice country, Morocco," he wheezed. "Nice scenery. I hate to think of seeing the last of it, if you know what I mean."

Ahmed did not seem to know what he meant. He stuck out his thick lower lip so that the purplish inner lining showed moist and glistening.

"I have taken an oath," he said in a harsh voice. "I have made a promise." He extended an emaciated arm and pointed down the trail. "But the road is open if you do not trust me, Sidi Capitaine. I shall not stop you."

"Don't be absurd," Langevin remarked placidly. "The idea never even entered my head. You couldn't shake me off now even if you wanted to."

He followed Ahmed through the right angled gateway into the black depths of the *ksar*. It was an airless rabbit warren, a maze of covered corridors and tortuous alleyways, of houses piled on houses, of rooms and cubbyholes and workshops and stables heaped one atop the other. Shafts of sunlight where dust motes swirled burst through chinks in the walls. In the semi-darkness Langevin was aware of a rustling, scuttling, whispering sound as women retreated behind doorways, dragging fear stricken children out of sight of his evil eye. A stale smell of dung and wood smoke and unwashed bodies hung in the air.

Ahmed paused on the threshold of a room where tallow candles, stuck to the floor, burned like yellow stars in the opaque twilight. A faint moaning note reached Langevin's ears.

"He is in here," said Ahmed. "Walk softly, *roumi*. The child is in pain."

Langevin was mildly astonished to discover that there really was a child and that the child was sick. Enormous, fever-bright eyes stared up at him from a pile of unclean rugs. The boy was so thin that his bones threatened to burst through the tightly drawn skin. His ribs stuck out like barrel staves.

Beside him crouched a wrinkled old woman, so gnarled and so old that she did not bother to veil her face when Langevin groped his way across the room. By way of greeting she spat between her toothless gums, a long jet of saliva which narrowly missed his red boots. There was no mistaking her sentiments where the "dog of an infidel" was concerned. In the shadows, half seen, half guessed at, other figures crouched cowled and motionless.

Langevin took off his *képi* and sponged his steaming forehead.

"Bring the candles closer, O Flower of Perfection," he told the old woman. "If I am to examine the boy I must be able to see."

She hesitated a fraction of a second too long. Ahmed, cursing between his teeth, sent her sprawling with a blow on the top of the head. He picked up the candles and held them steady for Langevin, who had dropped to his knees beside the child.

The minutes dragged by. One—two—ten . . . Langevin's stumpy fingers probed and explored, moving gently over the small, aching body. His questions and the boy's quavering answers alone broke the muffled hush which pervaded the room. The candles Ahmed held aloft burned with an unwavering flame.

Then, abruptly, Langevin sat back, resting his hands on his thighs. He waggled his head slowly from side to side.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said to himself, reverting to his mother tongue, "Do you realize that this unfortunate infant is probably suffering from acute appendicitis?"

Ahmed spoke no French.

"Is he very sick?" he inquired.

"He is," Langevin admitted. "It is a thing here—" he pressed his fingers against his right side. "It is diseased and must come out."

THE CANDLES wavered unsteadily, then again they burned with a clear, unwavering flame. Ahmed stood like rock while Langevin, in words of one syllable, explained exactly what he would have to do. He omitted nothing—not a single gory detail did he leave to the imagination of his audience. He exhibited his surgical instruments one by one, holding them up between thumb and forefinger as a showman might have done. Moreover, he made it plain that he was not a real *toubib*—a qualified surgeon. The operation might be a failure. The boy might die under the knife, or later of infection. He made no

promises. Even his diagnosis might be faulty.

Ahmed listened intently, knitting his brows as he tried to understand what the Frenchman was saying. When Langevin paused, he stood for a long while deep in thought, then he ran his tongue over his dry lips and grumbled—

"Is there no other way?"

"None that I can see."

Some of the onlookers stirred uneasily and the old hag cried out in a high pitched, cracked voice that the white man meant to murder her grandson, but Ahmed silenced them all with a curse.

Again there was a long, empty pause. Ahmed looked down at his son, and Ahmed said—

"Will he suffer much?"

"He will be asleep."

"And when he awakes?"

"If he lives he will suffer a little, but not much, and afterward he will grow strong and well."

"Then do it," cried Ahmed, losing his self-control. "Do it, and be done with it!"

Langevin struggled to his feet.

"*Alors, allons-y,*" he decided briskly. "Let's get to it. The first thing I want is light and air."

From then on he took command of the village and ruled it with a hand of iron.

The operation itself was a nightmare. He had to do everything himself—administer the chloroform, sterilize his instruments and keep a sharp eye all the time on the boy's relatives who, at sight of the first drop of blood, quivered and bared their teeth. Had the boy died, in all probability they would have torn Langevin to pieces. But the boy lived. Langevin's diagnosis had been correct, and he performed the ablation with the dexterity and self-confidence of a veteran.

Afterward, for three days and nights, he kept watch, guarding his small patient against dirt, prejudice and ignorance. At the end of the seventieth hour of his vigil he was as unruffled as he had been when he first set out.

"And now I am going home," he told Ahmed. "Your boy is very nice, but I happen to have several small matters to attend to down my way."

"Wait!" urged Ahmed. "The village is yours and we are thy slaves. My boy is still weak with that great gash in his side. Do not leave him now."

"Your brat is all right," retorted Langevin. "He's squirming like an eel. Before the end of the week he'll be all over the place. His fate lies in your hands, proud and boastful father. If anything goes wrong I refuse to take any blame. Keep him clean, keep him quiet, do not stuff him with food. Bring him down to see me in ten days."

For one brief instant Ahmed's anger flared up.

"And if I refuse to let you go?" he shouted. "What then? You promised to cure my son. Now you would leave him with an unhealed wound in his side. Am I a fool that I should let you murder my son and escape?"

That was as far as his outburst of temper was destined to go.

He was startled to discover a brand new and wholly unsuspected Langevin with blazing blue eyes and a tongue like a whip lash.

"I made no promises—" Langevin began, and for the next ten minutes he pitched into the native with a cold blooded fury which left Ahmed limp and bewildered.

There were no cheers when Langevin left the village. If the people felt any gratitude they hid it remarkably well. Ahmed rounded up an escort of a dozen or so. Some mounted on mules, the others on foot, they followed unwillingly in Langevin's wake. Ahmed himself tagged along at the tail end of the procession. The blindest of fools could not have failed to notice his unwillingness to accompany the captain.

Langevin, however, was unperturbed by this lack of enthusiasm. He lighted his pipe, pulled the hood of his black *burnous* over his head to ward off the rays of the vertical sun and ambled sleepily down the trail toward Ain-Hareb.

He understood the mental make-up of his hosts. If they could find a loophole through which to wriggle they would forget all about their promises. It would take weeks and months before they trusted him— but the hardest part of his task was over. When another crisis occurred they would turn to him again and, eventually, they would forget their inborn hatred. In a little while he would have them tamed.

RIDING along with his eyes closed behind his steamy glasses, he looked into the future, and he beheld dispensaries and schools dotting his valley, good roads instead of trails, artesian wells, irrigation canals, green fields . . .

The sharp crack of a rifle shot echoing and reechoing between the walls of rock brought him back with a jolt to the world of things as they are. All in a second the hot stillness was ripped wide open. From the boulders beside the trail snipers pumped a stream of lead into the slow moving party.

Langevin's mare went down. He rolled clear of the kicking hoofs and sat up, spitting out gobs of sand. He caught one brief glimpse of Ahmed and his escort; they had turned tail and were riding in a smother of dust, hell bent for leather back toward their village.

He had no time to ponder upon the ingratitude and cowardliness of Beni-Yaffara tribesmen. The firing stopped as abruptly as it had begun. Some one gave a long drawn yell. One, then two, then a score of men popped up behind the rocks. They closed in upon him, shouting as they came.

As soon as he saw them he realized that he had fallen into the hands of Chleuh rebels—the riff-raff of patriots, marauders, brigands and insurgents which the French occupation had driven back into the Tafilalet hills. They were neither cowards nor traitors. With them the issue was clean cut. When they caught a Frenchman, that Frenchman was very much out of luck. His passage from this world to the next was more than likely to be painful in the extreme.

Langevin was unarmed. He did not even have a knife within easy reach with which to slit open his arteries. The prospect of dying a bundle of raw meat and quivering nerves was not especially pleasurable, but as he had no choice in the matter, he accepted the fate he could not avoid in his most detached and philosophical manner.

Instead of preparing to fight till he dropped; instead of making a panic stricken attempt to escape from his assailants, he waited for them quite calmly, and spent the last few moments of his freedom cleaning the dust off the lenses of his glasses.

It was such an unexpected development that it took the wind out of the Chleuh's sails. They drew up ten feet away, gaping at this dumpy, stout little man who blinked his short sighted eyes and smiled as benevolently as though he were humoring a crew of boisterous infants.

"I fell off," he explained, "and these confounded glasses of mine are simply covered with adhesive dust. I think it must be the alkali."

The Chleuh edged in a little closer. Wary as wild animals they peered from side to side, hunting for some clue which would account for Langevin's unconcerned attitude. He was altogether too placid, and they were more than ready to believe that he was trying to lure them into some fiendish ambush of his own devising.

Langevin, who was beginning to find the pause somewhat trying—his knees hidden by the folds of the *burnous* were knocking together, and his mouth was as dry as punk—adjusted the spectacles on his nose and inspected his aggressors one by one.

"*Mon Dieu*, but you are slow!" he remarked. "What is it that delays you, my friends? I am all alone, I assure you. Your timidity under the circumstances is really absurd. Let us wave the formalities of polite society."

"We need no introduction," a voice broke in. "We have not met for quite some time, Captain Langevin, but I don't think you have forgotten me yet."

The owner of the voice, a slender, olive skinned young man who had edged in directly behind Langevin, spoke colloquial French without a trace of an accent. He had fine, clean cut features, and he might have been called handsome if his countenance had not been stamped with an expression at once haughty and fatuous. Self-esteem oozed out of him at every pore. Everything about him reeked of the braggart and the mountebank.

Beneath a *burnous* of lamb's wool dyed a pale shade of lavender he wore a smartly tailored riding suit. The breeches were of white whipcord, and the tunic, which fitted skin tight over his narrow hips, was of white duck. It was evidently an expensive outfit, but it badly needed the services of a dry cleaner. His beard stank of perfume and his finger nails were black.

Langevin spun around on his heel.

"Why, of course!" he exclaimed. "It is Seyid ben Senussi. This is quite a surprise!"

A faint smile distended the Arab's lips He nodded curtly.

"Aye! It is Seyid. Up to his old tricks again, Captain! You wouldn't listen to me—you laughed at me. And now I am going to make you listen whether you want to or not!"

While he was speaking he tucked his silver mounted riding crop beneath his arm and helped himself to a cigaret.

"I regret I can not offer you one," he apologized with obvious insincerity, "but my companions would not appreciate the gesture. They have not had the advantages of a European education, and in their simple way they hate you. It is only with the greatest difficulty that I can keep them from making sausage meat of you, my very dear Captain."

He lighted the cigaret and exhaled a lungful of smoke.

"Good tobacco," he went on. "French 'Gitanes' with gold tips, if you please. I came across them a week ago in the baggage of one of your colleagues. Briffault, his name was. Commandant Sylvestre Briffault. He was coming over the Meridja Plateau with a company of Tirailleurs. I had the painful task of drilling him through the skull at four hundred meter."

Langevin did not feel called upon to say anything. He stood spraddle legged, with his hands folded across his stomach and his head cocked slightly on one side, listening to the Arab's boastings.

Seyid was an old acquaintance of his—one of those pests which crop up in the best of colonies from time to time. He came of a family of Algiers dock laborers, but the educational facilities provided free of charge by the French authorities had made him dissatisfied with his lot.

HE HAD gone to France to make his fortune and had ended up as a professional dancer in a dubious Montmartre cabaret. While it lasted he was in clover, but he had had the misfortune to relieve a middle aged Nuremberg lady of a string of pearls. The intrinsic value of the beads was small but the lady's husband had raised a loud squawk and Seyid had gone to prison.

When he was released, as an added punishment, he was sent back to his native land, where he had promptly gone from bad to worse until, tracked by the police of every city along the seaboard, he had drifted back into the Tafilalet hills.

He was sharp witted and glib of tongue, and he had quickly risen to a position of prominence among the rebel clans. He posed as a rebel against the French occupation—a patriot preaching a holy cause—but in reality he was a bandit preying upon defenseless villages and caravans.

Langevin had had an interview with him shortly after he had become notorious as the leader of a *harka* of several hundred guns in the northern Tafilalet range. He had tried to induce the French to make him a substantial cash allowance; a sug-

gestion which Langevin had refused to countenance.

He ought to have been locked up, for he was really dangerous, but for once Langevin had been caught napping and had underestimated the native's importance.

Since then Seyid had developed into a first rate threat to law and order. The list of the outrages he had committed in the name of liberty was long and bloody, and his power had increased as the list grew longer until he had become one of the most important rebels in the Tafilalet.

"And you thought I wasn't worth bothering about," he added, looking down his nose at Langevin. "Me! You poor fool, I could let loose such a storm that you and your breed would be swept clean out of the hills! One word from me and this land would be aflame from one end to the other."

He paused to watch the effect of his words upon the Frenchman, and still Langevin said nothing. He looked more than ever like an amiable schoolmaster. His brick red face was streaked with dust and sweat, and his lopsided *burnous* hung from his shoulders after the fashion of a burlesque academic gown. A more unwarlike, unsoldierly, unheroic figure would have been hard to find in all North Africa.

And Seyid, master of the situation though he was, was the first to lose his composure.

"You thought you owned this valley, didn't you?" he jeered. "You thought these Beni-Yaffara belonged to you just because they accepted your rifles and your five-franc bribes. But I—" here he tapped his chest with his finger tips—"I can shake their faith whenever I like! What have you to say to that?"

"What is there for me to say?" Langevin protested. "Don't be so theatrical. You can't expect me to get all wrought up about a perfectly obvious situation. You found out somehow that I was staying with Ahmed Zogwar—"

"His own cousin Mulay came and warned me."

"Very well—" Langevin gave his shoulders a slight shrug—"Mulay told you. So you staged an ambush, my escort ran away, my horse was shot, and I have been captured. Really I don't see anything to get excited about yet."

"No," agreed Seyid, "you wouldn't. You're too stupid and too conceited to understand anything. I wasn't worth bothering about the last time we met! But this time, Langevin, you're too insignificant for me to deal with!"

"Indeed?" Langevin smiled, and his smile so infuriated the native that he spat in the Frenchman's face. For good measure he smacked him with the back of his hand.

"Shut up and listen to me!" he ordered. "Be still if you want to live! I could have you picked to pieces and thrown to the vultures, but you are not worth the trouble. Do you know what I am going to do with you? I am going to use you as a messenger. I don't deal with cheap little captains any more; I deal with zone commanders, and by God, if they won't listen to me I'll shove them clean off the map!"

"It all depends, of course, what you want of the colonel," Langevin pointed out. "He's a very busy man."

"But not too busy to listen to me," asserted Seyid. "Do you know who I am? Do you know what I can do? At a moment's notice I can throw five thousand men into action against you. I can swing every doubtful tribe my way whenever I see fit. I—" he shook his fist at Langevin—"I can do all this. The man you hounded out of France and out of his own city! But today I hold the whip hand—I can dictate my own terms.

"War?" he suddenly became more conciliating. "Who wants war? I am a reasonable man and I ask for nothing better than a peaceful understanding. I gave you one chance. You were a fool and you let it go by. Today you are too insignificant for me to deal with, so I go over your head to your colonel and through him to the resident-general. Either they accept my terms, or I will show them what a real revolt can be like."

"And these terms are?"

"A full pardon, recognition of my pres-

ent position and an annuity of one hundred thousand francs."

"That is what I am to tell Colonel Tergnier?"

"It is. And he'll accept my offer if he knows what he's about. I've written to him, but I suppose my letters have been sidetracked by underlings like yourself. This time I am not going to be sidetracked. This time my message is going straight through to the colonel at El Tirane, and you are going to act as my messenger so that they may see how little I fear their dirty little liaison officers, who try to act as though they were gods."

He turned to his men and gave a sharp order. A dozen pairs of hands lay hold of Langevin. He was thrown to the ground and stripped. His elbows were tightly bound behind his back. Then Seyid stepped in close and thrashed him savagely with his silver headed riding crop. The thin lash whistled through the air, rising and falling again and again until Langevin's flesh from knee to shoulder was crisscrossed with livid welts out of which blood dribbled in slow, heavy drops.

II

DRIVEN by a Legionnaire who had once been one of the best amateur racers in Europe, Colonel Tergnier's automobile left the El Tirane Redout and hurtled down the Boulevard Lamoricière.

The road was rough; the car leaped and swayed like a ship in a heavy sea; its horn howled continuously. At its approach the crowd which filled the roadway fled toward the safety of the sidewalks. In its wake it left an enormous cloud of dust and camel dung and obscene Arabic oaths.

The chauffeur sat like stone, eyes front, chin up, shoulders as stiff as a board, his right foot on the gas. He knew what was expected of him.

When the state of the road permitted him to do so Colonel Tergnier also sat bolt upright and rigid. He was a tall, angular, bony man, smelling of soap and starch. He bristled all over. His wiry gray hair, clipped short and brushed straight up on end, bristled stiffly; his mustache stuck out aggressively at right angles to his lip; his eyebrows jutted forward and met over his nose. Even the tufts of hair growing out of his ears bristled. He had a thin beak of a nose, a tight mouth and a square, hard jaw.

He was all soldier, from the gold braid on his *képi* to the soles of his boots. A duty loving, "damn-you-if-you-flinch, God-bless-the-regulations soldier".

He did not know the meaning of fear; he did not know the meaning of anything. He did not want to know anything except his duty. That was enough for him. Duty, France, the flag, his battalion of the Foreign Legion—his whole life. On the granite of such characters empires are builded and sometimes flourish.

Beside the colonel sat a worried civilian with a sunburned nose and a panama hat. The force of the wind drove the brim of the panama down over his eyes and kept it there. The infrequent glimpses of the landscape which he was vouchsafed filled him with apprehension. He had a vivid imagination and he visualized with painful lucidity exactly what would happen if the speed fiend in the front seat lost control of the machine.

His name was Badoit—Georges Badoit—star feature writer of one of the largest and most important Paris dailies. He was famous for his word pictures of faraway places, and for his uncanny ability to give a political slant to the most trivial incidents. He had been sent to Morocco by his nationalist-progressive employer to write up his impressions, and his visit had been nicely timed to coincide with an attack in the Chamber of Deputies on the minister of colonies.

He was much too important to be side tracked, and he had been wished on the colonel that morning accompanied by a message from the resident-general at Rabat, instructing Colonel Tergnier to show M. Badoit every courtesy. The last two words were underscored in red ink.

Tergnier hated Badoit: a. Because he was a civilian; b. Because he was a news-

paperman; c. Because he winced every time the car went over a boulder.

On the other hand Tergnier worshiped every scrap of paper which came out of the resident-general's office. His duty lay plain before him; he was showing Badoit every courtesy and the town.

The car sped like a bullet down the road. A white building flashed by.

"Hospital," said Tergnier. "Fifty beds."

"*Ah, oui!*" mumbled Badoit.

Another building.

"Police headquarters," Tergnier explained.

The house vanished in the dust before Badoit could open his mouth.

The automobile roared through a gateway, grazing a donkey with its right mud guard and a beggar with the left.

"This is the native town proper," Tergnier went on as they rushed along a narrow street lined with whitewashed houses. "I intend to widen this street. Too congested. Build a new city soon. Sewers. We're coming to the marketplace. Very colorful, so I'm told. Personally, can't see it. No eye for such things. Dirty natives, that's all. No sanitation."

The car, held up by a long string of camels, was traveling at a slower pace. Badoit breathed a sigh of relief.

"These natives look like peaceful people," he said, for the sake of saying something.

"Peaceful? Eat out of my hand, monsieur!" Tergnier declared. "When I came here, four months ago, the place was rotten with sedition. Putrid! The former zone commandant had—shall we say—different ideas. I changed all that. Force—that's the only thing these rascals appreciate. Force—properly applied. Dynamics. Today, look at 'em, going about their business as meek as lambs."

They looked more like cutthroats to Badoit. Lean, hard eyed men with none of the easy going unconcern he had noticed in the big cities. The whole atmosphere was different. Instinctively he glanced over his shoulder to make sure that no one was aiming a gun at his back.

"Love—" the colonel was saying— "I don't want to be loved. One loves one's country, one loves a pretty woman. That is all. I want respect. I am respected. El Tirane is quiet and prosperous. Soon it will be clean. No more discontent. Peace, order, cooperation, that is what I have achieved. Now we come to the marketplace. On the south side observe the mosque of Sidi-el-Hadj-Mokhtar—Umberto," he spoke sharply to the chauffeur, "halt!"

THE chauffeur applied both brakes. The car stopped. The pillar of dust, however, did not stop. It rolled on, smothering the passengers in a blinding, choking cloud. Badoit, coughing miserably, held a handkerchief to his nose and mouth. He became aware all at once of a tumultuous shouting and yelling. He glanced at the colonel. Tergnier was leaning forward, frowning ominously as he tried to pierce the veil of flying dust.

Dim figures flitted through the mist. A man suddenly leaped out of nowhere, crashed against the radiator, gave one startled shriek and fled waving his arms above his head.

"Lots of noise, is there not, Monsieur the Colonel?" Badoit remarked acidly. "How meek, may I ask, are these people?"

"Noise," grunted Tergnier. "Certainly, noise. And why not? It's a big market. Most important trading center in the district. People come from all over—"

Then a stone sailed through the air and crashed against the windshield. The plate glass gave way, showering the occupants of the car with jagged fragments.

The chauffeur, a paragon among Legionnaires, did not stir. He sat with his arms stiffly folded across his chest, waiting for further orders. A thin stream of blood trickled down his cheek from a gash beneath his right eye.

The dust was beginning to settle. Badoit caught sight of a group of men scuttling past the car. They appeared to be in a great hurry. In their haste they overturned a vegetable stall, which collapsed with a loud splintering of dry wood.

It occurred to Badoit that the business methods of El Tirane were singularly unorthodox, but he did not feel called upon to pass on this thought to the colonel. He made a point of keeping his impressions to himself until he could pass them on, bolstered up with exclamation marks, to his readers.

Tergnier had jumped to his feet and was craning his neck out of his stiff collar as he tried to see through the haze.

"*Sacré bon Dieu!*" he ejaculated, "I want to know who threw that stone. It was aimed at my car! I'll fine the whole name of a cow of a town! Confound it, where is the police? Where's the police, I say?"

Abruptly the last layer of dust dissolved and was gone. The white buildings lining the marketplace stood out sharply against the hard blue sky. But the buildings did not attract Badoit's attention. He did not even notice the famous green tiled minaret of the mosque.

A riot was in full swing in the middle of the marketplace. A great crowd seethed and swirled in among the stalls. Everybody seemed to be fighting everybody else. Small groups, detached from the main mass, ran toward the safety of the side streets. Men fell and were trampled underfoot. Traders armed with slats of wood battled desperately to protect their goods. A long shanked Arab galloped madly after a camel which had had enough of the turmoil and was trying to get out of town. The rooftops were lined with hysterical women who encouraged the contestants with piercing shrieks.

Badoit was no longer worried about his personal safety. He objected on principle to being killed in an automobile accident, but this was different; this was news.

He grabbed at his camera.

"Put that down!" barked Tergnier. "No pictures, monsieur!"

"But—"

"This is a military zone. Photographs may not be taken without the permission of the zone commandant. I refuse to grant permission!"

Badoit shrugged his shoulders.

"Peace—order—cooperation!" he remarked, raising his eyebrows. "It's very interesting, I'm sure."

Crash! Above the tumult a shot rang out. A dozen more followed. The crowd burst open like a bladder. In ones and twos, then in dense masses, the natives scattered toward the side streets. They gave the automobile a wide berth. It appeared to frighten them even more than did the bullets whistling about their ears. They swerved away, shielding their heads as they ran.

Tergnier watched them, a sour smile on his lips. He did not know what the uproar was about, but he knew who was to blame.

"*Canaille!*" he jeered. "See 'em wince. I had a machine gun on the front of the car when I first came here, and they haven't forgotten it yet."

The shooting went on until the last group had melted away. A score of limp figures sprawled about in the wreckage. Two men ran out of a house toward a third who was dragging himself along on his elbows. A crackle of rifle fire greeted them. They went down, flat to the ground, with the stiff awkwardness of death already upon them. The wounded man squirmed convulsively, then he too lay still.

A startled oath burst from Tergnier's lips, not because of the brutal *finale* to the riot, but because of the strange gathering which he beheld on the far side of the square.

Against a whitewashed wall splashed with red streaks stood four khaki clad *gendarmes* guarding a naked, fleshy man mounted on a small donkey. The man's arms were bound behind his back, his ankles were fastened together beneath the donkey's belly. A rag covered the lower part of his face and, perched askew on his head, he wore a military *képi*. His body was plastered with filth.

"*Que diable?*" sputtered Tergnier. "Never seen such a sight in my life. Man's as naked as an earthworm. Scandalous! And, as I live, that's an officer's cap he's wearing. Making a laughing stock of the

army! If they think—" He left the sentence unfinished and bellowed in his parade ground voice, "Brigadier of *gendarmerie*—Colonel Tergnier speaking to you—come here at once!"

The *gendarmes* had been too preoccupied by their immediate surroundings to notice the colonel's car half hidden as it was behind the overturned and gutted stalls, but the blast of his voice made them leap almost out of their skins.

GENDARMES are a breed apart. In France and in French colonies they act as military police, highway patrols and agents of the department of justice all rolled into one. They are incorruptible and efficient, pig headed and stolid, courageous and hide bound. The law is their one and only god, and discipline is their prophet.

One word from Tergnier was enough to bring those four *gendarmes* back to earth with a bang. The brigadier, a large, thickset man with a great black mustache, slung his rifle on to his shoulder and brayed a string of orders at his companions.

They marched across the square in military formation, hustling the donkey along with them.

They halted six paces from the car. The brigadier stepped forward another three paces, presented arms and thundered in the colonel's face:

"Market patrol, *mon Colonel*, and a suspicious character!"

That was the sort of discipline Tergnier appreciated. The *gendarmes* stood as rigid as ramrods with their backs turned to the rabble gathered in the alleyways.

The colonel's harsh features relaxed.

"What happened?" he demanded. "Who's that scamp? Where did he obtain that *képi?*"

The brigadier opened his mouth.

"Take it off!" ordered Tergnier, pointing to the *képi*. "*Voyons*, do you not know better than to allow the uniform of France to be degraded in this fashion? That's an officer's cap."

The cap was whisked off the prisoner's head. He offered no protest, for the rag tied across the lower part of his face muzzled him very thoroughly. He wriggled his shoulders and opened his eyes very wide, but no one, with the possible exception of Badoit, noticed these signals.

"Now then," Tergnier went on, "what's all the disturbance about, Brigadier? In one word syllables, if possible, what has happened?"

The brigadier's statement was clear, concise and unimaginative.

At nine o'clock, accompanied by Gendarme Crossard, he had been standing on the corner of the Street of the Weavers, superintending the activities in the marketplace.

At eight minutes past nine a commotion had occurred in the said street.

A notorious halfwit, Yacub the Inspired, had appeared leading the donkey upon which the naked prisoner was mounted and tied. The populace, incited by Yacub's shouts, had been throwing filth and garbage at the prisoner to the prejudice of good order and police regulations.

When apprehended and questioned Yacub had declared that he had been ordered by one Seyid ben Senussi, nicknamed "The Lion," to lead the prisoner through the streets of El Tirane and to hand him over to Colonel Tergnier in person.

According to Yacub the prisoner was a false prophet and a besmircher of the true Faith. The accusations had aroused the religious passions of the natives, who would have murdered the prisoner if he, Brigadier Pichon, had not intervened.

He had placed Yacub under arrest and had tried to commandeer a cloak with which to conceal the prisoner's scandalous nudity.

Yacub, thereupon, had flown into a maniacal rage and had called upon the excited natives to protect him against the French "butchers." He had drawn a knife and had tried to stab Gendarme Crossard when the latter prepared to handcuff him. Crossard, in self-defense, had been com-

pelled to make use of his carbine. Death had been instantaneous.

Gendarmes Lessieu and Michot, stationed by the mosque, had heard the shot and had reached the scene of the disturbance just before the infuriated mob got completely out of hand.

He, Pichon, had tried without success to restore order. He had made the three customary summonses, and as these had not been heeded, he had ordered a volley to be fired in the air. This had still further aroused the natives who had made a riotous assault upon the four *gendarmes.*

In consequence whereof, he, Brigadier Pichon, had been obliged to open fire upon his aggressors. Fire had been continued until the disturbance had been quelled.

Tergnier gnawed at his mustache.

"Quite approve," he nodded when the brigadier reached the end of his statement. "Praiseworthy conduct. Bad situation. Religious fanaticism—worst of all. We must—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of a company of his own Foreign Legionnaires, who trotted out into the market square with bayonets fixed on the end of their rifles.

At sight of the colonel the officer in charge rasped an order. The company swung into line, halted, dressed and presented arms. It maneuvered with the smooth accuracy of a machine.

The officer marched up and saluted.

"Duty company, my Colonel. We left the redout as soon as the first shot was heard."

Tergnier glanced at the motionless ranks. He frowned.

"Poor turnout, Captain Rigault. Very poor. Your men are puffing like broken down cart horses. And they're sloppy. Third man from the right, front rank, cartridge pouches up under his armpits. And what are they grinning at, hm? Grinning on parade? Amazing."

The Legionnaires' faces became masks.

"Better!" Tergnier went on. "You'll take those men's names, Captain, and see they do ten days extra drill. Abominable discipline, monsieur! Still—" he shrugged one shoulder—"the battalion's improving. You came fairly quickly."

HE ISSUED instructions in a curt, sharp voice. El Tirane to be placed under martial law. The *kaid* and twelve leading merchants to be placed under arrest pending fixation of the fine which was to be levied against the town. The ring leaders of the riot to be handed over within four hours. Market to be closed until further orders.

"And now—" Tergnier went on as soon as the officer had been disposed of—"now about this prisoner, Brigadier. Filthy blackguard. Had no right to be wearing that *képi.* Take him to the police station. Find out where he got it. Send me a report. I want to know about his relations with Ben Senussi. That's all for the present. I'm going back to barracks."

He was about to speak to the chauffeur when Badoit butted in.

From Badoit's point of view the affair was front page news. Properly written up, with plenty of gory details, it ought to be worth at least a hundred anti-governmental votes in the Chamber of Deputies. All it needed was publicity, and publicity was his specialty. But what he wanted most of all was to find out the identity of the gagged and naked man who, it seemed to him, was the central figure in the drama. He could not afford to wait, for he knew that once his cable dispatches started on their way to Paris he would probably be asked to clear out of the protectorate.

"Pardon me, my Colonel," he said quickly, "but I rather think that man is trying to say something to you. It may be of the utmost importance! Look at his eyes. Observe them closely. He is trying to tell you something, but there is a gag over his mouth. A gag, my Colonel!"

Tergnier drew himself up straighter than ever. He loathed being given advice by civilians. Had he had the power of so doing he would have placed Badoit under arrest. Their was not another soul in El Tirane who would have had the audacity

to speak to him in that familiar manner.

It was on the tip end of his tongue to blast Badoit into the middle of next week, but just in time he recalled the "every courtesy" clause in the resident-general's letter. Simultaneously it flashed through his mind that Badoit, unless he were treated with great tact, might be fool enough to put the wrong interpretation upon the events he had witnessed.

Not that Tergnier was suffering from an uneasy conscience. Far from it! A little blood letting, in his opinion, was good for native races. It helped to lower their religious temperature and prevented the spread of the bacillus of nationalism. At heart he had the friendliest of feelings for docile natives. The others, however, the trouble makers and the fanatics, the sooner they realized that they had met their master the better for all concerned. Such carrion deserved no pity. Force, vigorously applied, was the only way of dealing with them.

Badoit could not be expected to understand these things. Badoit was an accursed ink slinger who lived by concocting lies. And Badoit, for the good of the service, confound him, had to be placated.

Colonel Tergnier gave a fair imitation of a man who is trying to smile. The effort looked painful.

"A gag, monsieur?" he remarked. "Where?" He allowed his gaze to rest on the prisoner's face. "Ah, yes, to be sure. Of course—the gag. No doubt this man can tell us something. The thought had occurred to me. Brigadier," he went on in a sharp voice, "cut that rag off the man's mouth at once! You should have done it long ago. Haven't you got one sou's worth of initiative?"

The rag was ripped away. The lower part of the prisoner's face was covered with gray whiskers matted with dirt and blood. He was the most repellent creature Tergnier had ever laid eyes on. Flies buzzed about him; he stank like a goat; his paunchy body was caked with muck which the sunlight was drying out and turning into brownish scales. He looked leprous.

"I shall have to speak to him in the vernacular," Tergnier told Badoit. "French, I'm afraid, would be wasted—"

Then the prisoner, who had been working his aching jaws like a cow chewing its cud, suddenly found his tongue.

"Colonel Tergnier," he said in French, "for the love of God tell this ass of a *gendarme* to put my cap back on my head. I don't want to die of sunstroke."

Tergnier's face became congested with rage.

"Your cap!" he sputtered. "Why, you dirty rascal—"

"Don't jump at conclusions, please! I want that *képi* put on my head quick or I'm going to faint. My name is Langevin. Captain Emile Langevin, liaison officer attached to the Beni-Yaffara."

"What's that!"

"You heard me the first time. I can't afford to die. There will be hell to pay if I do. Get me off this donkey and into the infirmary as quick as you can. I'm all in."

"But I don't understand!"

Langevin's eyes blazed.

"If you wait until you do you'll have a dead captain on your hands. I can't stand much more of this."

The brigadier caught him as he drooped forward on to the donkey's neck.

"Can't you tell an officer when you meet one!" thundered Tergnier. "Imbecile! I'll have those stripes off your arm if you aren't more careful. Get the captain into this car instantly!"

He became aware of a slight jerk at his coat sleeve. Looking down, he perceived that the offender was Badoit.

"Just a little question," the newspaperman said quickly. "Is that officer's name spelt 'Lengovin' or 'Langevin'—with an 'o' or—"

"I refuse to answer your question!" shouted Tergnier. "Let go my arm this instant, monsieur! I will not be mauled!"

Badoit slid his notebook into his pocket.

"Peace—order—cooperation!" he said sweetly. "What a beautiful motto, Monsieur the Colonel! So dream-like, so—"

"Your bus leaves this afternoon at four," rasped Tergnier. "And don't forget it."

III

AS SOON as they heard the colonel's footsteps ringing on the tiled floor of the *patio* Commandant Laisne and Lieutenant Saurette jumped out of their chairs and clicked their heels together.

"Sit down, messieurs," Tergnier said graciously. "Sit down."

But they were careful to wait until he had lowered himself into a comfortable seat before they obeyed his order.

A bullet headed, pink skulled Bavarian orderly appeared out of nowhere, bearing coffee and liqueurs on a brass platter which he set down on a low stool close to the colonel's knee.

The service was smooth, soundless and swift. Anything less than perfection was not tolerated at the headquarters mess. Tergnier helped himself to a cigar, and as he placed it between his teeth, not a second too soon, not a second too late, the orderly held out a lighted taper.

Three puffs and the cigar was alight. The orderly vanished. For a long moment no one spoke. The night was dark and warm. Above the rooftops of the barracks stars glittered in a velvety black sky. A thin little wind hurrying through the garden made the palm fronds scrape and rustle. Then, quite close at hand, a bugle call rang out and the lights in the barrack room windows went out one by one.

Tergnier glanced at his watch; it was exactly ten o'clock, Paris Observatory time.

"Punctual," he remarked. "Right on the dot. Proper."

Sighing contentedly, he stretched out his long legs. After a brief pause he belched—a gruff, soldierly belch with no frills about it.

"I knew it," he grunted. "Stomach's out of order. Always does get out of order when I'm pestered. It's been a hard day."

"A very hard day," agreed Laisne who, as second in command, always shared his chief's opinions about everything.

"Coffee is one of the finest stimulants I know of," Lieutenant Saurette chimed in. "Even after a difficult day like today coffee always makes me feel better."

Saurette was one of the colonel's bright young men. He did the buying for the headquarters' mess and yet, notwithstanding the crushing nature of his duties, he managed also to keep an eye on the clerical force in the office and to supervise the regimental canteen.

Tergnier sipped his glass of Grand Marnier.

"Nothing makes me feel better," he declared. "I'm too exasperated. Bad for me, exasperation is. Bile. Blood pressure." He gave his shoulders an impatient shrug. "Doctors—bunch of charlatans. Don't know what they're talking about. Fakes. It's all mental."

"There's nothing worse," Saurette admitted.

"Not a thing," corroborated Laisne, trying to look both thoughtful and worried. "Aspirin—"

The colonel was not interested in drugs.

"It's that confounded reporter, or whatever he calls himself, who started it," he grumbled. "Might think I hadn't anything better to do than to act as a guide for every inky fingered scrivener who chooses to tour Morocco."

"A nosey fellow," Laisne asserted.

"Nosey!" echoed Tergnier. "I'd like to have him in the battalion for a few days. I'd drill some manners into his thick skull. Impudent rascal! I suppose he's convinced we have riots here every day in the week. Fool! Wanted me to wait while he counted the corpses!"

"The power of the press—" began Saurette.

Tergnier cut him short.

"Power — rubbish! Anyway, we're through with him. He's gone, isn't he? You saw him off, I suppose?"

"He couldn't get away quick enough," Saurette laughed. "He was all ready to go an hour ahead of time. I don't think he'll want to visit any other stations. He kept babbling something about the joys of civilization—railroads, you know, and telegraph lines—all that sort of thing."

"Yes—telegraph lines, the rat!" snorted the colonel. "I'll have to drop a personal note to the general. And anyway, I don't care what that damn' reporter saw. A little shooting! Unavoidable shooting! Let 'em rant and rave, those puling politicians and their myrmidons!" He swung off on to another tack. "It's that liaison officer's fault—Langevin. An imbecile, that man. Naked on an ass! No wonder the natives were out of control!"

His subordinates smiled.

"Nothing to laugh at," he went on, biting furiously into his cigar. "Never had any faith in this Langevin. Didn't like the tone of his reports, not from the very beginning. What did I say to you, Saurette, when we took over this garrison? Didn't I say, 'Before long we'll have to deal with those Beni-Yaffara ourselves.'?"

"That's it exactly," Saurette admitted, thunderstruck by his chief's memory. "Almost word for word."

"And the dolt allows himself to be captured by a brigand who doesn't even think enough of him to kill him! *Bon Dieu!*" He banged his fist down on his knee. "I tell you it's a blow to our prestige. We can not afford to let the swine laugh at us!"

"It's a serious matter," Laisne agreed.

"Serious! Why, we don't even know what it's all about! That's how serious it is. We'll have to wait until this Langevin condescends to recover consciousness!"

"I telephoned the hospital before leaving the office," Saurette pointed out. "They said he was still very weak, and his back is all slashed to ribbons."

"Days may go by before we can get anything out of him!" Tergnier complained bitterly. "Days! He's so soft. Fat and soft! *Brrr!* Horrible! An officer ought to keep himself in good trim. Physical drill—that sort of thing. I am going to have a few words with him when—

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance at his elbow of the mess orderly who bowed stiffly from the hips, German fashion.

"Begging Monsieur le Colonel's pardon," he announced, "Captain Langevin sends his compliments to Monsieur the Colonel, and wishes to know whether Monsieur the Colonel would like to see him now or tomorrow morning."

Tergnier was so taken aback that for a second or so he literally sputtered, while his subordinates registered polite astonishment.

"Did you say Captain Langevin?" the colonel inquired.

"With Monsieur the Colonel's permission, yes," admitted the orderly.

By that time Tergnier had recovered from his surprise.

"Of course," he snapped. "I'll see him out here at once. Ask him to step this way—and take the coffee set with you as you go."

A MOMENT later Langevin limped out on to the *patio*. He looked tired and ill; beneath his eyes there were puffy brown pouches, and deep lines of suffering marked the corners of his mouth. But at first glance it was not his face which attracted the colonel; it was his uniform. He had borrowed an outfit belonging to a medical man who was both taller and thinner than he was. The result was so startling that it made the colonel bristle. He was accustomed to seeing his officers dressed in smart, strictly regulation pattern clothes, and the sight of this dowdy, hollow eyed creature rubbed him very much the wrong way.

Nevertheless he kept his temper under control long enough to greet Langevin and to introduce him to his aides. The latter, taking their cue from the colonel's manner, were careful not to commit themselves. They were friendly, but there was no warmth in their friendliness, and they adhered strictly to the stereotyped forms of politeness which mean exactly nothing at all.

Langevin, however, refused to play the game. He broke all the rules when, in answer to the colonel's question, "You have quite recovered, I trust?" he said:

"No, my Colonel, thank you, I haven't.

I am not exaggerating my symptoms when I assure you that I am feeling rotten."

To conceal his irritation at this unexpected and unmilitary answer the colonel coughed loudly. Laisne and Saurette became stony faced.

"Really!" exclaimed Tergnier when he had stopped coughing. "So you are feeling rotten. That is too bad. I suppose—" he spoke acidly— "I suppose I must congratulate you on your courage. Dragging yourself out of a hospital cot! Very fine, isn't it, Commandant? A splendid example!"

"Splendid," concurred Laisne with elephantine sarcasm.

"Sit down, Langevin," Tergnier went on. "Mustn't keep you on your feet. There's an easy chair. Make yourself comfortable. You know," he added, thrusting out his jaw, "I'm surprised. Our doctors—competent fellows—they don't discharge a patient as a general rule unless he's fully recovered." He took a long drag at his cigar and repeated, "Fully recovered! Make a note of it, Saurette. Remind me to ring up the hospital first thing in the morning. Can't have this sort of thing going on."

Whereat Saurette positively tittered.

Langevin sat down very gingerly and made himself as comfortable as possible. The hostility of his hosts made no impression upon him.

"Let us exonerate the physicians," he suggested, smiling blandly. "They wanted to detain me, and I assure you that while it lasted I enjoyed the luxury of clean sheets and quiet surroundings, but—" he chuckled— "I had to tear myself away."

Inarticulate sounds came from the back of Tergnier's throat. His eyes grew bloodshot.

"Yes," Langevin went on. "I tore myself away because there are several important matters which I must attend to at once."

Then came the explosion.

"*Sacré nom d'un chien!*" rasped Tergnier. "I demand an explanation, Captain Langevin! Important matters which require your attention, indeed! Are you or am I in command of this district? Any important questions which have to be settled will be settled by me! If you're a sick man you should have stayed in hospital. You're not indispensable. Nobody is. I'm not! You'll pardon me if I show you scant sympathy; I expect a more soldierly attitude from my subordinates. I can't stand whimperings and whinings. No. I can not! Never heard of such a thing! Now that you are here you'll be good enough to let me have a full account of the circumstances which brought you, naked, into the El Tirane market place. And you'll stick to facts, monsieur! Facts!"

Langevin tried to comply with this order but before he said more than half a dozen words the colonel began to squirm. He did not like Langevin's manner. It was too quiet and too precise. And it seemed to him that behind everything Langevin said there lurked a faint, intangible undercurrent of mockery.

Nobody, least of all an obscure captain, could afford to take such liberties with the commanding officer of the El Tirane zone. Tergnier saw red and he set about the annihilation of this insubordinate upstart with grim deliberation. It made the conversation singularly difficult. Everything Langevin said caused a fresh irruption. The first one came when he told how he had gone up to Ahmed's village.

"You went there alone!" snorted Tergnier. "My God! Alone! What are those irregulars of yours paid good money for if it isn't to protect you?"

"The Beni-Yaffara are difficult people to handle, and—"

"Difficult be damned, monsieur! I have never had any confidence in those Beni-Yaffara. What they need is a taste of massed machine gun fire. We'll never get anywhere with them until they respect us— Anyway, go on, Captain; go on! What next?"

Langevin went on, but he did not get very far.

"Wasting your time performing operations!" the colonel cried. "Don't you

know there's a fully equipped native hospital right here at El Tirane? Best in Morocco. I've seen to it. Modern equipment. Everything. And you had the temerity to undertake a difficult operation?"

"I had to. My people won't come down to El Tirane, Ahmed least of any. They're shy—"

"Shy, the swine, are they? I'll cure them of the blushing habit! Isn't that what *you* are supposed to do—to inspire them with confidence and make them malleable?"

"Given time, I know—"

"Rot! I'm not going to wait any longer. *Bon Dieu, non!* I've been waiting four months, and I'm through temporizing. In my opinion all these subsidies we're squandering on your irregulars are a waste of money. You think so too, don't you, Laisne?"

"We didn't indulge in subsidies when the battalion was stationed at Foum-Baskarra," the commandant declared.

"And we had 'em eating out of our hands!" added Tergnier. "It's the fault of those politicians in Paris, with their soft hearted nonsense about the rights of man. Radical bosh! And then, Captain, what happened? You carved up this boy. So far so good. I don't quite see the connection yet, but no doubt—" he looked at his watch— "I shall do so eventually."

HE DID not interrupt again until Langevin explained how he had been ambushed and his escort had deserted him.

Thereupon the colonel, unable to control himself, leaped to his feet and walked up and down the *patio* like a caged leopard.

"That's what happens!" he fumed. "There you are! The result of faulty policies! Insane policies! I'll have to inform headquarters. I hope it reaches Paris. It can't go on. It's intolerable! Wasting good money on such traitors."

"But none of Ahmed's men receive subsidies," Langevin pointed out gently.

"The whole village ought to be shelled off the face of the map. And you fell, I take it, into the hands of this amateur brigand, Seyid ben Senussi? He didn't kill you. I'm surprised he didn't kill you! Can you tell me why he spared your life?"

Langevin told him.

"He wants one hundred thousand francs a year," Tergnier repeated, his voice breaking so great was his indignation. "That cheap little upstart—"

"—has a large following these days."

"Ridiculous! Absurd! I know all about him. Complete record of his activities in our files, haven't we, Saurette?"

"Down to his thumbprints."

"I don't doubt it," Langevin put in, "but you have not got Seyid himself on file. He's loose in the Tafilalet hills. Make no mistake about that young man. He can do a great deal of damage. That's why I was in such a hurry—"

"What have you to suggest?" Tergnier snapped; and he added before Langevin had time to open his mouth, "Do you realize the gravity of the present situation? All due to your biased attitude, Captain! There has been a riot in El Tirane. The French uniform has been dragged in the mud and ridiculed. Our influence has been degraded in the eyes of the natives—and this in the presence of a newspaper correspondent who is sure to make the most of it! We must take strong measures to make a recurrence of such incidents impossible! We must act boldly! What do you think, Laisne? Can we afford to lie down and do nothing?"

"Certainly not!" said Laisne, glaring at Langevin.

"You see?" Tergnier went on. "The time has come for us to adopt new policies. We're going to tame the Beni-Yaffara and snuff out this Ben Senussi once and for all. How do you think we ought to go about it? Have you any plans?"

"That's why I left the hospital so soon," Langevin admitted. "With your permission, my Colonel, I intend to leave tomorrow morning for Ain-Hareb. I'll round up a few of my best men and set a trap for our friend Seyid. I think it can be managed without very much trouble or blood-

shed. It ought to be done quietly and without any fuss. If a slip-up occurs we'll have a first class uprising to contend with, but I'm pretty sure—"

Tergnier stopped dead in his tracks and planted himself in front of Langevin.

"I thought as much," he commented. "Now listen to me, monsieur: we have had enough of this nonsense. It is going to stop. Maybe you do not mind having been scourged and stoned and vilified, Captain, but I do." He smacked his chest with the palm of his hand. "I do! It is an insult which I refuse to swallow at any price. Nor do I approve of the steps you propose taking. Are your treacherous Beni-Yaffara to go unpunished? And why should Ben Senussi be caught and killed like a thief in the dark? Most certainly not. Force, monsieur, that's what is needed. Force—the iron hand. El Tirane has been punished today for its share in the rioting which you caused—"

"Blame your *gendarmes*," retorted Langevin. "They didn't have to open fire but they lost their nerve. That's one thing I shall mention in my report."

"And I admire what they did," Tergnier asserted. "Did their duty. What would that newspaperman have thought if we hadn't quelled the disturbance? But that's beside the point. El Tirane has been punished; now I am going to deal with the real trouble makers. Tomorrow morning I am going to take four companies with me into the hills, monsieur, and show those Beni-Yaffara of yours what a little straight shooting can do. And I'll put the fear of the Lord into Ben Senussi's heart, monsieur! Wants a hundred thousand francs, does he, the rascal? I'll cure him of all desire for worldly wealth!"

Langevin's face grew hard. His manner ceased to be quite so easygoing.

"You'll be heading straight for disaster," he declared. "You'll be playing into Ben Senussi's hands. He can chew up your four companies and drive—"

"Four companies of the Legion, monsieur, are a match for a hundred times that many lousy rebels. How dare you sneer at my men? I demand an apology, monsieur."

"I have none to offer," Langevin retorted. "I have the highest regard for your troops, but I happen to have an intimate knowledge of the ground you propose to fight over and of the people with whom you will have to deal. Moreover, since I am in charge of the border zone—"

"Subject to my control and my approval!" rasped Tergnier. "There has been far too much shilly-shallying. The time for words has gone by, monsieur. I am a man of action, and now I am going to act."

Langevin was crushed and annihilated. His arguments were brushed aside. His warnings were laughed to scorn. Was he—a mere captain of the intelligence service—trying to give orders to the colonel commanding the district? Had he forgotten the meaning of such homely words as obedience, discipline and respect? It was his duty to inform the colonel of the political and military situation as it developed from day to day; it was the colonel's task to draw whatever conclusions he saw fit and to take whatever steps he deemed necessary.

Langevin could do one of two things: obey orders like an officer and a gentleman, or else refuse to obey and allow himself to be placed under open arrest pending a general court-martial, which would decide whether his peculiar ideas were or were not justified.

Having delivered himself of this speech, Tergnier flounced back into his chair and helped himself to another cigar.

"If I refuse to obey," Langevin said after a long pause, "will you go ahead with your plans or wait until after the court-martial?"

Tergnier chuckled happily. He knew that he had won, and he felt rather sorry for this gray faced, tired man who fought so stubbornly for what he considered to be the right thing. As a rule his subordinates agreed with him so promptly that he found it difficult at times to assert his authority. Langevin, of course, was a

fool, but at least he had the courage of his opinions. The man had more backbone than he, Tergnier, had credited him with.

"We start tomorrow morning at five," he declared, rubbing his hands together. "Make up your mind to that. Never let grass grow under my feet. Never! If you want to be placed under arrest—very well—there are other officers who have traveled through the Beni-Yaffara territory. There's Commandant Laisne, for instance. He's been all through those hills."

Langevin gave a weary shrug. He recalled vividly the visit Laisne had paid him at Ain-Hareb. The commandant had stayed with him for a week. He had spent five days hunting mountain goats and guzzling champagne; the last forty-eight hours he had devoted to telling Langevin what an easy job he had.

Left to themselves these fire eaters would smash to pieces everything he had accomplished and stir the tribes into open rebellion. It was what they wanted; it was what they liked—and if disaster overtook them he would have to bear most of the blame.

He had no choice in the matter. Since the colonel was bent on making a bullheaded rush into the hills, he, Langevin, was in duty bound to shoulder his full burden of responsibility and to do his best to avoid a calamity.

"*Bien, mon Colonel,*" he agreed. "I am at your orders.

Tergnier expanded."

"That's the way to talk," he crowed. "Sensible fellow. You've caused quite a bit of trouble, Langevin, one way and another, but, by God, we'll work together and show these rascals that they can't afford to make monkeys out of us. Laisne, we'll have to change tomorrow's routine orders. Saurette, how about rations and transport? Langevin, I won't detain you. Go to bed. Go to bed at once. You need a good night's sleep. We can talk things over in the morning. Breakfast with me at four o'clock sharp. On your way now. *A tout à l'heure!*"

IV

THE COLUMN came under fire as soon as it left Ain-Hareb. At first it was nothing more serious than some long range shots which did very little damage, but as the morning wore on the advance guard and the flanking troops met with ever increasing resistance. The pace slowed down to a crawl. There were long, uneasy pauses while rebel bands were being dislodged at the bayonet point. At noon when the full blast of the sun struck down into the valley, the troops were still five kilometers from the Shirak Well—which they had been expected to reach at ten—and the enemy fire all along the front was settling down to a steady thunder.

Colonel Tergnier, sweating in the shade of his broad brimmed sun helmet, frowned angrily as he peered up ahead through his binoculars. The punitive expedition was not developing according to schedule. It was not the sort of warfare he had anticipated. Instead of commending their immortal souls to Allah and rushing in *en masse* to be ripped to pieces by the machine guns, the rebels were fighting a very skilfully planned delaying action. They were not trying to ambush the column, nor were they attempting to stage a flank attack. What they were doing was far more objectionable; they were keeping five hundred dust choked, dry mouthed Legionnaires from reaching the Shirak Well. It looked almost as though somebody in their camp were endowed with a considerable amount of cunning.

If they could hold up the advance until nightfall the column would be compelled to fall back upon Ain-Hareb, and they could claim to have thrashed the French in open battle. Such a claim was bound to have a bad effect upon the other Tafilalet hill tribes, who were watching Seyid ben Senussi's meteoric career with far more interest than he really deserved.

The colonel was not worried. He had been in tighter corners and had always found some one on whom to fasten the responsibility whenever anything went

wrong. Nevertheless he was growing extremely impatient.

Not an inch of ground had been gained for the past half hour. Strung out in a long line, the Legionnaires stood under arms, waiting for the order to move forward. They were hot, tired and bored—and they looked it. No man, no matter how well trained he has been, can crawl along for twelve kilometers, uphill all the way, with a hundredweight of kit on his back and a flaming sun eating into his skull, and still retain his parade ground polish. And then if, coming on top of this long grind, he has to stand still for an additional thirty minutes, with an empty water bottle at his side and a full pack weighing down upon his shoulders, he is more than likely to develop innumerable complaints both physical and mental.

Despite the presence of company officers and platoon sergeants the troopers were beginning to grumble, which added to the colonel's irritability. The rank and file, he had been brought up to believe, were made to be seen and not heard. He had not the slightest intention of allowing them to break ranks; at any second the scuffle up front might peter out, and he wanted to reach the well as quickly as possible. Moreover, there was the question of discipline. It did not do to coddle Legionnaires. They fought all the better when they were on edge.

As a matter of fact Tergnier was not bothering about his own men. His wrath, for the time being, was focused on Captain Langevin and his irregulars who, somewhere out of sight behind a spur of rock, were bearing the brunt of the fighting.

"*Mais enfin!*" he exclaimed testily. "This is ridiculous. What can be the matter with Langevin and those gloomy cutthroats of his? Soldiers, he has the audacity to call 'em! Soldiers, bah! They're a waste of good money. Langevin doesn't seem to have any control over them whatsoever! Holding us up like this—never heard of such a thing in my life!"

The firing swelled up to a roar which rolled and boomed down the valley. Spent bullets, coming from the hilltops, went by, shrilly whining, and kicked up little puffs of dust where they struck the ground. A sergeant of the 3rd Company, standing not fifty feet from the group of staff officers, went down, drilled through the head. He lay grotesquely contorted, a clownish bundle of arms and legs, pressing his smashed face against the earth.

After one look at the dead man Tergnier straightened up to his full height and smacked the palm of his hand down on to the pommel of his saddle.

"I've had enough of this nonsense," he declared. "Lieutenant Saurette," he went on, turning to his aide, "be good enough to ride forward again and instruct Captain Langevin to attack at once. I want you to stay with him and see that my orders are carried out. Tell him that if he's not through within fifteen minutes I shall have to withdraw his so-called warriors. I shall move up behind you and watch developments from that ridge."

Saurette cantered away. He had already made three trips into the firing zone and the prospect of heading into it again did not arouse his enthusiasm to any very high pitch. It was one of the hottest corners he had ever come across and, judging by the volume of noise, it was growing hotter than ever. A half-company of the Legion, of course, could snuff out the rebels in no time—still, he was very glad he was not compelled to lead any troops into action that day. Carrying messages was quite bad enough.

THE HILLMEN—the Lord alone knew how many of them—were massed on a slight rise behind a wedge shaped rampart made of heaped up boulders. In front of this improvised fortress the ground fell steeply away. It was littered with stones large enough to trip up a hurrying man and make him wrench his ankle, but which would not have sheltered a kitten from the bullets hailing down the slope.

Saurette left his horse with the lead-

ing platoon of Legionnaires and made his way along on foot. He found Langevin squatting in a shallow *oued* midway up the incline leading to the rebel position. In the gulley with Langevin there were a hundred or more Beni-Yaffara tribesmen, ugly looking customers who snarled and gabbled at the lieutenant as he crawled along.

He was slightly flustered, for the slugs were plowing through the crumbling brink of the *oued* inches above his head, and he transmitted the colonel's message word for word without attempting to tone it down.

Langevin took his pipe out of his mouth and grinned at the perspiring messenger—a slow, amiable grin which made the lieutenant shrivel up. He was startled to notice that Langevin's left hand was wrapped in bloody rags and that an angry red gash scarred his neck.

"What can the colonel think I am doing?" pondered Langevin. "Get up, my dear fellow, I want to show you something."

Grunting, he stood up, rising waist high above the embankment. A storm of bullets greeted his appearance.

"It is not pleasant," he confessed. "I take no particular joy in heroics, but it's really the only way of getting a clear view of the field of battle."

Saurette, after hesitating for one split second, heaved himself to his feet. The floor of the valley was strewn with corpses, scattered all the way up to the breastworks.

"There, you see, are my men," Langevin went on, in the same unemotional voice. "At a rough guess I have had fifty killed. A third of my forces are out of action."

"Quite," assented Saurette. "I—I see."

"I knew you would." Langevin chuckled. He pointed up the gully with the stem of his pipe. "I'll be moving on, bearing off toward the left, as soon as I can convince my people that it's their duty to get themselves killed for the greater glory of our beloved motherland. Incidentally, if I should stop a bullet, you might tell Colonel Tergnier that a frontal attack will cost him— *Duck!*"

They went down together just in time to avoid the scythe-like sweep of a machine gun. Beneath the impact of the stream of lead the brink of the gully caved in. Seven men, crouching close to Langevin, were struck down. Five of them, hit in the head, were killed outright. A wave of panic spread down the gully. There was a good deal of shouting and jostling, but Langevin spoke sharply to them and they squatted down again, hugging the bank, muttering among themselves.

"That's what I wanted to warn you against," he explained. "There's at least one machine gun up there. The gunner's a novice, but he's doing his best."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Saurette. "Machine guns! I begin to understand!"

"Exactly — machine guns," agreed Langevin. "This is a crazy business, you know. I had a great deal of trouble convincing my people that they ought to help us track down Ben Senussi, and the colonel rewards them by shoving them into the thick of the fighting. They can't figure out why they should have to commit *hari-kari* while five hundred regular soldiers are marking time somewhere in rear. They don't like it. It's not their way of doing things. They're beginning to believe we're deliberately trying to get 'em killed off. I'm going to go forward again as soon as they've steadied down a bit, but, I warn you, they may balk. They've had a bellyful of our war. Probably they'll go crazy and start fighting your Legionnaires. If they do, you might tell the colonel that they stood it as long as they could. They're good men, whatever they may do. They've fought like lions."

"Of course, if you don't think it safe," ventured Saurette.

"Safe! My dear young man, I always obey orders, but I wish to God your colonel had had enough sense to keep his nose out of my hills. Anyway, here goes."

Saurette looked at the natives out of the corner of his eye.

"You're going to attack again?" he inquired.

"I'm going to try to."

Langevin stood up and called to his men, waving them forward. He called in vain. A few of them stirred uneasily; the majority refused to move. He scrambled up and stood on the bank of the gully. Bullets ripped past him. Turning his back to the rebels he harangued the Beni-Yaffara. They cowered down, sullenly shaking their heads. They were altogether through.

"There you are," Langevin shrugged, turning to Saurette. "Two years' labor shot to hell. It will take a generation—"

The high pitched call of a bugle rising clear above the clamor of the guns cut him short.

Colonel Tergnier, tired of waiting for the irregulars to clear a way to the Shirak Well, was sending in his Legionnaires.

THEY came forward in perfect order, deployed in open order across the valley, officers six paces front and center, serre-files three paces rear. The sunlight flashed on the polished steel of the bayonets. The battalion bugle and drum corps played them into action.

It was as fine a demonstration of military efficiency as Langevin had seen in many a long day. He watched it from the shelter of the gully to which he retired, after he had managed to convince his demoralized warriors that the white soldiers were not being sent in to kill them off.

The attacking company maneuvered with the speed and precision of a machine. As soon as it came under fire it progressed by short rushes. Between rushes the platoons went to ground—but once they left the last scrap of shelter behind and faced the open slope gaps appeared in the ranks. Still they came on, unwavering, heading straight for the center of their objective.

In their wake they left a trail of fallen men. The ranks closed in. They neared the gully—crossed it. A whistle rattled piercingly. A bugle took up the call.

"Charge!"

Yelling, they leaped forward. Then, spluttering, coughing, crackling, the machine gun opened fire and hosed them down. Still they went on, stumbling over the corpses of the Beni-Yaffara, falling and dying among them.

The front ranks were gone; the rear ranks caved in. The survivors, bunched together in small knots, raced up the slope. A few reached the rampart. They clawed their way up on to the crest. For a little moment they hung there, teetering unsteadily on the brink of eternity, then they too went down and were swallowed up, and the 1st Company of the 4th Battalion of the French Foreign Legion ceased to exist.

Langevin's self-control, for once in a way, had deserted him. With clenched fists and blazing eyes he cursed Colonel Tergnier for the senseless slaughter and, strangely enough, he cursed the Beni-Yaffara huddled about him in the gully.

Saurette had no words with which to curse. He was young and impressionable and in his way he had been very proud of those tight jawed, sun blackened Legionnaires. Tears dribbled down the sides of his face and ran into his mouth.

"*C'est magnifique!*" he blubbered. "Magnificent! I've never seen such bravery in my life!"

"Magnificent—hell!" retorted Langevin, shouting to make himself heard above the uproar. "Why, in the name of the good God, doesn't he turn their flank as I was trying to do? He's murdering his men, that damn' butcher!"

But the fight was only just beginning. Tergnier, through his binoculars, had seen his men wiped out. He threw No. 2 Company into action before the hand-to-hand scuffle came to an end. Close behind, the 3rd swung into line. With only one company in reserve to cover his retreat in case of defeat, the colonel was shoveling every man he could spare straight at the rebel guns.

They trotted forward to the same brave blare of the bugles into the flying dust and

the trailing smoke and the whispering hail of bullets.

One by one the officers dropped and rolled beneath the hobnailed boots. A gaunt, raw boned sergeant-major, with his *képi* cocked over one eye, led the advance. When he reached the gully, three hundred yards from the point where the Beni-Yaffara were huddled, he half turned and shook his rifle at the sweating, laboring troopers.

"*À moi, la Légion!*" he brayed. "Who wants water?"

And the full fury of the rebel fire lashed them as they lumbered across the open.

"See them come!" Langevin shouted at the Beni-Yaffara. "Will ye squat in your holes like jackals while other men die? Ye have lost a few of your kin—what of it? *Incha' Allah!* Look up! Can ye even see your dead in that litter? Not one! The bullets fly wide. We are not the target this time! Up! Our time has come! Who follows?"

He was out of the gully again, a squat, round figure with a wind blown gray beard, pointing the way up the slope.

Lieutenant Saurette joined him, and Saurette died in his tracks, shot down as soon as he clambered out of the *oued*.

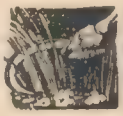
It may have been due to the nerve racking yelp of the bugles, or the acrid smell of burned powder—perhaps they knew instinctively that the tide had turned and that victory was close at hand; whatever the cause the Beni-Yaffara went mad.

They were up and away, pressing hard on Langevin's heels, a baying wolf pack bounding up the slope without order or discipline or reason.

But Langevin's presence of mind had not deserted him. He struck, according to his original plan, at the flank while the weight of the rebel fire was directed against the Legionnaires. A ragged volley greeted him as he neared the rampart. A few of his men went down. The others raced on, swarmed over the mound of boulders, butchered the handful of hillmen who confronted them and hurled themselves, howling with triumph, upon the backs of Seyid ben Senussi's followers.

They were outnumbered twenty to one, but the shock of their impact was so violent that the rebels gave way. With bullet and gun butt, with nails and sabers and fists they tore their way through the enemy ranks. The machine gun was silenced. Langevin shot down its crew, swung it around single handed and emptied the last cartridges of the belt into the thick of the hillmen's ranks.

As soon as they recovered from their initial surprise they fought with a grim fury which more than offset the fury of the Beni-Yaffara. The latter were given no time to reload. They were hemmed in and shot down at point blank range and hacked to pieces.



FOR A MOMENT Langevin saw his small band dwindling away, reeling beneath the blows of the overwhelming counterthrust. The moment was short lived. He still had the Beni-Yaffara under control when the Legionnaires came over the rampart.

After that the situation became more normal and orthodox, in keeping with the best established theories of colonial warfare. The Legionnaires formed up, pumped half a dozen salvos into the center of the swirling, milling mass of their antagonists, split it in two and charged home with scientific accuracy.

They did not shout "*Vive la France!*" They went into the kill to the cry of "*Les vaches! On les a!* The cows! We got 'em!"

And they had. They had them cold.

The 2nd Company widened the breech; the 3rd went straight through, and the final touch was added by the machine gun battery which followed in Langevin's footsteps and enfiladed the rebel flank at a two hundred and fifty meter range. The guns had a perfect target to aim at and, apart from the casualties they inflicted upon Langevin's irregulars, they did excellent work.

As Colonel Tergnier had so clearly foreseen from his observation post a mile and

a half in rear, once the rampart was carried the struggle was over.

The hillmen were not lacking in courage; indeed they had far too much courage for their own good. Time and again they rallied and tried to drive off their aggressors, but they could not break through the jaws of the steel trap which was closing in about them.

Abruptly their fighting spirit ebbed away. Seyid ben Senussi had tried to make them adopt white man's tactics, but he had omitted to pick out second lines of defense, and he had no reserves with which to stem the swift running tide of defeat. Once his followers were pried loose from the position he had selected they forgot all the things he had tried to drill into them. For them there was no middle way between victory and defeat. Such things as honorable failures and strategical retreats were devoid of meaning. They reverted to type. Common sense told them that they were licked; their instinct of self-preservation did the rest. They turned tail and fled. There was nothing dignified about their retreat —a wild dash for safety, each man for himself. The Legionnaire's bayonets sped them on their way, and when they drew clear the machine guns hunted them down and sprayed them as they ran.

The march to Shirak Well became a procession.

There was, however, a very large fly in the ointment. The rebels had had the barbarous idea of blowing in the well and had blocked the shaft with the bowels of goats and sheep.

Instead of finding water the first troopers to reach the objective were greeted by a foul smell and a cloud of flies. On top of the overflowing filth lay the mangled bodies of two Legionnaires of the 1st Company who had had the misfortune to fall while still alive into the hands of the hillmen.

It was not a pleasant sight. It was so far from pleasant that it made the incoming troopers curse between clenched teeth, but it did not dampen Colonel Tergnier's enthusiasm.

Napoleon at Austerlitz could not have been more magnificently pleased with himself than the colonel was that day. Chin up, chest out, bristling, he rode up to the well at the head of the reserves and the baggage train. His eyes were moist with unshed tears of pride as he gazed upon the remnants of the three companies which had done the dirty work and which, in his own words, had added a fresh chapter to the imperishable records of their peerless regiment.

They had suffered terrible losses, but their dead had not died in vain. Their memory would live after them. France would never forget their unflinching courage! At one blow they had scored a decisive victory. The rebellion? Sacred name of a little pig, there was no more rebellion! It had been crushed—smothered—snuffed out! Many a long day would go by before another brigand chief could delude the Tafilalet hillfolk into believing that they were a match for the men of the 4th Battalion of the Legion!

"You have done your duty," Tergnier concluded from the top of his horse. "I—your colonel—I salute you!"

And he did. The heroes betrayed no corresponding emotion. Caked with dirt, hard eyed and callous, they stared back at him, and some of the remarks they muttered would have caused him quite a shock. When he paused for breath a voice from the rear rank of No. 3 Company inquired impolitely—

"Hey, when do we drink?"

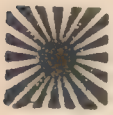
It was a gross breach of discipline, but it went unpunished for there were no senior non-coms left to track down the culprit, and Tergnier was in a lenient mood.

He laughed, showing all his teeth, vastly amused by this piece of impertinence.

"We'll drink our fill at Ain-Hareb," he told them. "There's nothing more for us to do up here. Our work is done, and well done, my infants. The next time these fine warriors have a few bullets to spare they'll think twice before they try conclusions with us! And I'll tell you something else—from Ain-Hareb we're going

back to barracks. Each one of you will receive two additional wine rations to commemorate our victory."

Both the water and the wine, however, were still a long way off. Before the return journey could begin there were several matters which required immediate attention. The wounded had to be gathered in, the dead had to be buried; all over the valley there were quantities of ammunition, rifles and equipment which had to be salvaged and loaded on to the pack mules.



WHILE his gallant men toiled through the hot afternoon the colonel sprawled on a camp chair beneath the awning of his campaign tent. He too was hot and moderately thirsty, but such trifles did not dampen his high spirits. He had scored a sweeping victory which headquarters would hear about in due course of time. His casualties, true enough, had been somewhat heavy. Légionnaires, fortunately, were cheap and plentiful. They did not have to be nursed along and husbanded like French conscripts, thank God. They were ideal shock troops, foreign mercenaries without kith or kin, made and trained to be boldly sacrificed in boldly conceived offensives. Nobody could accuse him of lack of moral courage. The battle of the Shirak Well! Most decisive battle he had ever planned. Most decisive campaign in the history of the Moroccan Protectorate. *He* did not make a fuss for weeks in advance and pester headquarters for reenforcements. He went straight in at twelve hours' notice and mopped up in four days a rebellion which some of his colleagues would have allowed to drag on for four years.

The more he turned the matter over in his mind the more complacent he became. Even when he caught sight of Langevin trudging into camp, hours after the last shot had been fired, his temper remained unimpaired.

Langevin's appearance tickled his sense of humor. He was dirty, unkempt and drooping with fatigue. He limped. His back was bent. His left hand, probably scratched, was buttoned inside his tunic. There were blood stains on the tunic. He looked so forlorn and miserable that the colonel was moved to pity the poor, soft hearted, conceited fool who thought he knew how to handle natives.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "Langevin! Of all people! I was about to send out a search party. Thought you were lost. Glad to see you. Sit down." He pointed to an empty ammunition container. "Box. Several things I want to talk over with you— The dirty swine blocked the well."

Langevin nodded.

"You knew it? Humph!" He leaned forward, grinning fiercely. "What do you think of your rebellion now? Go for 'em—stick to 'em like a leech—strangle 'em. That's the way I fight. Smash 'em! And they are smashed! Did you see them run? We can go back to El Tirane and sleep on both ears. Ben Senussi won't stop running until he reaches the Congo. Your rebellion is over. There wouldn't have been any rebellion at all had I known the true facts."

"Yes, I saw them run," agreed Langevin in a weary voice. "But I don't think the rebellion is over. In fact—"

Tergnier cut him short.

"In fact you're never satisfied. It's too bad. What more do you expect, hm? Miracles? We've broken up Ben Senussi's *harka*. As a fighting force it no longer exists. So far we've counted close on six hundred dead. Think of that! The moral effect—devastating! No need to go further. Ben Senussi's power has been destroyed. That's what I meant to do. It's done. I'm going home."

"And do you know what they'll say?" retorted Langevin. "They'll say they forced you to retreat; they'll say they outwitted you and killed off so many of your men that you had to fall back all the way to El Tirane. They'll dig up your dead—they're lying thick in front of the ramparts—and they'll parade the heads in every village from Ain-Hareb to Kaffaroud. You've got to go back for water. I

know that. And you'll have to bring up reenforcements—"

This was too much for the colonel. His good humor cracked beneath the strain.

"Captain Langevin," he began, frowning ominously, "when I need your advice—"

"Oh, let me finish," Langevin insisted. "You're a full colonel; I'm a captain. Discipline—all that sort of thing. I don't give a curse for it just now. Put me under arrest if you like, but I'll be damned if I'll sit quietly by and watch you butcher everything I've tried to do."

Tergnier opened his mouth, but the only sounds which issued from his throat were inarticulate gurgles.

"Ben Senussi's not finished yet," Langevin went on. "Don't think it for one minute. Why, he's only just beginning. If I'd had my way we'd have treated him like a cheap marauder. You've made the hill tribes look on him as a great leader. You'll have to round him up and shoot him dead before anything remotely resembling peace can be restored. You've given him a cause—and if you back out now you'll be giving him what he needs most of all, a victory."

IT OCCURRED to the colonel as he listened to this absurd outburst that Langevin was not responsible for the things he was saying. The poor devil was sick, wounded and obviously unnerved. Officers in their right minds didn't flatly contradict their seniors. It wasn't done.

"My dear fellow," he said gently, "I've been wondering — I see you've been wounded. You must see the doctor. What you need is a good long rest. Don't worry about anything. I'll ask headquarters to see you get a comfortable billet. Strongly recommend you. You've been out of touch with civilization far too long. Need bracing up. Do you all the good in the world."

His gentleness was wasted on Langevin, who said emphatically:

"I am very sorry, *mon Colonel*, but you can not get rid of me like that. If you retire—"

"There are no 'ifs' about it. The enemy has been destroyed. We start back toward Ain-Hareb this afternoon and leave for El Tirane tomorrow morning. I need a bath. That is final."

Langevin shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you'll have the whole district up in arms and it'll take a division to restore order. I'll stay at Ain-Hareb and watch developments. That's where I belong."

"You won't stay there long if I have anything to do with it," thought Tergnier but he kept the thought to himself, for there was no point in arguing with a sick man.

"That will be fine," he agreed. "I'm sure the Beni-Yaffara will be like lambs hereafter. They've seen what we can do. Fact is, I'm tempted to ask Rabat to place the zone under my direct control. But that can wait. By the way, I don't see any of your people. You came on alone?"

"They have gone back to Ain-Hareb."

"Without waiting for orders from me! I am astounded!"

Another black mark was entered against Langevin.

"They happen to be irregulars," he pointed out. "They're not used to our ways of fighting and they don't want to be sacrificed all over again. Once, for them, is enough."

"The dirty cowards! After the way in which they behaved—"

"They did very well," said Langevin, who seemed determined to be as unpleasant as possible. "Without them, *mon Colonel*, you might still be marking time down the valley."

"Preposterous, monsieur! Preposterous!" snapped Tergnier. "It is my considered opinion that they are the worst knaves I have ever come across. That, monsieur, is my opinion! Never did believe in mincing words. And while we're on the subject, let me add that I thoroughly disapprove of everything you have done. Everything! Pampering treacherous scoundrels! Futile! I do not

want to hurt your feelings, but I warn you I'll have some hard things to say about you in my report. I have offered you a loophole—you can withdraw with dignity before you are officially removed. If you stay I shall admire your misguided courage while deploring its consequences."

It was a nice speech, almost a diplomatic speech, but it merely increased Langevin's stubbornness.

For a moment he was silent, sitting bowed down, staring at his dusty boots. When he looked up the colonel was surprised to notice that a change had crept over him. Somehow, he no longer looked so easy going and mild. His face, gray and worn though it was, seemed to have turned to stone. There was about it a hard, merciless quality altogether unexpected and alarming.

And Tergnier, who was not devoid of insight, realized that his valuation of Langevin had been wholly mistaken. Beneath the grime and the sagging cheeks he saw, all at once, the fighter—cold blooded, shrewd and possibly, where he was concerned, dangerous. The intelligence service, he remembered, was not in the habit of choosing its men at random and those it selected it backed to the full extent of its power.

The colonel braced himself, bristling, ready for trouble. He was not going to let a miserable liaison officer tell him what to do. Langevin was scared, that was the root of the whole matter. He was losing his nerve. The man was a clown—parading stark naked through the streets of El Tirane. The biggest fool in creation ought to be able to understand that the rebels had been thrashed. They wouldn't come back—ever. Why the devil should he waste his time marching and countermarching through the hills hunting for a handful of lousy goat herds, who would scamper out of range whenever he caught sight of them? It did not make sense and, anyway, police patrol work was Langevin's business. Let him make use of his Beni-Yaffara since he thought so much of them.

"Well?" he inquired sharply. "Nothing to say? Day dreaming? What's on your mind?"

"If you retreat—" began Langevin.

"I am not retreating. Fix this idea firmly in your head, monsieur. Victorious troops do not retreat. Your choice of words is objectionable."

"When your victorious troops retire, Monsieur le Colonel," Langevin tried again, "I shall stay at Ain-Hareb. That is where I belong. For once I am indispensable. By staying perhaps I can avert a catastrophe, but I doubt it. You have gone too far—or not far enough."

Apoplectic, bulging eyed, Tergnier bayed at him:

"Catastrophe! Rot, monsieur! Drivel! I have restored order and tranquillity. If anything goes wrong again before I have had time to inform headquarters of your gross inefficiency, I shall hold you directly responsible. And that, monsieur, is final!"

V

IT TOOK the Beni-Yaffara four days to bury their dead according to the Berber ritual, which is long drawn and noisy. But no sooner had the soul of the last warrior been committed to the care of his Maker, while the women still wailed their grief from the housetops, than a delegation of ten elders, headed by the kaid, waited upon Langevin.

Their visit did not take him wholly by surprise, for they were a practical minded people, and even in the midst of their sorrow, they had not lost sight of the fact that pay day had arrived. Pay day, indeed, was overdue. As a rule they waited until Langevin summoned them. Failing to receive the usual notification, they had given him exactly twenty-four hours' grace; now, all too clearly, they wanted their money and they made no attempt to disguise their feelings. The minute they trooped into Langevin's office he became aware that they were in a truculent, self-assertive mood.

Watching them closely while they were

squatting down on their hams, he noticed that several of them were trying to conceal bulky packages beneath their *djellabas*. He refrained from making any comment, but he signaled to Belali, who was hovering in the doorway, to stand by for any emergency. There was something more than the money question underlying the Beni-Yaffara's tenseness, and Langevin was well aware of the forces which had been working to inflame their minds.

Ever since the troops had gone back to El Tirane the streets of Ain-Hareb had been alive with disquieting rumors, which Belali had collected and brought home to his master.

It was rumored, for instance, that Seyid ben Senussi, now called Seyid the Deliverer, was about to pursue the French and drive them into the sea. Clans from every part of the Tafilalet range were flocking to his standard. He was said to be endowed with miraculous powers, a sure way of appealing to the imagination of the superstitious hillmen. Bullets, it was claimed, had pierced him during the Shirak battle and had not wounded him. His *burnous*, peppered with holes both front and back, was being carried from tribe to tribe in proof of this supernatural occurrence. Invulnerable to French bullets, he was promising to lead a conquering army to the sack of Fez-el-Bali; and last but in nowise least, it was whispered that he had put a price of a thousand silver dourous on the head of every French officer in the hills, not excepting the head of Captain Emile Langevin.

Langevin's worries were not limited to such rumors. The Beni-Yaffara resented the losses they had suffered, and the religious ceremonies of the past few days had rekindled their latent fanaticism. Nevertheless, Langevin had been moderately sure that he could retain his hold upon them provided he kept to his share of the bargain. He was worth far more than a thousand dourous to them, and they were not likely, no matter how much they might hate him, to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs—while eggs were forthcoming.

Unfortunately the convoy which should have arrived the day before, with money for the irregulars and food for himself, had not yet been sighted. Either Tergnier had purposely detained the convoy at El Tirane, or else—

Langevin gave a mental shrug, and at the same time hitched his chair around slightly so that his right hand was within easy reach of the drawer of his desk where lay his revolver.

A queer smell was slowly pervading the room, a smell which did not emanate from the Beni-Yaffara, who had powerful and divers stinks of their own—the thick, cloying smell of stale blood.

Langevin's eyes went back to the lumpy packages half hidden beneath the stiff folds of the *djellabas*.

"Sidi Capitaine," began the kaid, a sharp featured man with a strident voice, "we have come for the accounting. Not only an accounting for those of us that are still alive, but also for those that are dead."

There was in his manner no trace of his customary deference. He spoke sharply, as he might have done to an inferior.

"I am told," he went on before Langevin could speak, "that it is because he fears us that your colonel sent us ahead of his own soldiers to be killed—and to kill the men of our faith. And you—" he flung out his hand, palm upward, and shook it at Langevin— "you, whom we trusted, you led us to the slaughter! By the Holy Shrine, there is to be a reckoning! True to our promise, though our hearts were heavy, we followed you. Yesterday—"

"Yesterday was a day of mourning."

"Aye. And tomorrow and ten years hence. Pay us now, Sidi Capitaine, for the blood we have spilled, for the faithfulness of our service, for our dead!"

Langevin raised his right hand and let it drop lightly on the edge of the desk drawer.

"Ibrahim," he said quietly, "you know, and your people know, for you have not been wholly blinded by your tears, that the convoy has not yet arrived."

The kaid's lips drew back in a snarl.

"What have we to do with your con-

voys? Did our sons wait when they were called upon to die? Pay!"

"When the convoy arrives."

"Will it ever arrive? Will it? Now that Ben Senussi has driven your soldiers out of our hills; now that his men guard the passes—will it arrive?"

His voice rang out mockingly.

"Why should we follow you, when there comes among us a Deliverer?"

"To enslave you as you have been enslaved before!"

"A saint—a true believer! You are an infidel, Sidi Capitaine. Because of your smooth tongue we placed our trust in you, and it has befallen as it is said in the Book. We have been deceived and have been made to turn our swords against the breasts of our kin. Aye, and the gates of Paradise may be closed to our dead!"

WHILE he was speaking his companions kept up a ceaseless flow of muttered comments which grew louder and louder, until all ten of them, furiously, were shouting at the top of their lungs.

One man, more excited than the rest, sprang to his feet.

"The Deliverer warned us!" he cried. "He told us we would not be paid. He has crippled the French and despoiled them. And here is a present for thee, *roumi*, a present from him we call the Deliverer, who had thee whipped and set thee upon an ass!"

He snatched a package out of the folds of his *djellaba*, tore away the canvas wrapping and flung on Langevin's desk the severed head of a white man. The eyes had been burned out of their sockets; the ears and the nose had been hacked off. A Legionnaire's *képi* was crammed down on the skull.

"See him!" yelled the man. "That is what happens to the men of your breed who come into our hills. Thy day is over! Thou hast tricked us and lied to us and withheld our just dues!" He swung around and appealed to his companions, "Give him the gifts of Seyid the Deliverer that he may know who rules our land!"

Three more heads rolled at Langevin's feet. He did not have to be told what had happened. The convoy, dispatched without a sufficient escort, had been ambushed and captured. The money was in Ben Senussi's possession. Some of it, in all probability, had already found its way into the hands of the Beni-Yaffara.

If Colonel Tergnier, with malice aforethought, had set out to make Langevin's position at Ain-Hareb untenable, he could not have devised a better scheme. He had not, of course, been guilty of any such Machiavellian practises. He had sent off the convoy with its "peace-time" escort simply because he was convinced that the unrest had been smothered. But his optimism had robbed Langevin of his one trump card, money. Without money he was powerless; he could not hope to counteract Ben Senussi's influence. Once the Beni-Yaffara went over to the rebels the last dike would be gone, and the way to the lowlands would be wide open.

Meanwhile the delegates gathered in the small, stiflingly hot room were lashing themselves into a frenzy. They shook their fists at Langevin, and they jeered at him with all the venom of weaklings who find themselves suddenly in a position of superiority. Jostling, shoulder to shoulder, they edged in a step at a time, yelling their hate in his face.

Not to be outdone by his henchmen the kaid shouted:

"What is he worth to us now, this dog? A thousand dourous we have been promised. Shall we let him slip through our fingers—"

That, decided Langevin, was going a little too far. The time had come for him to do more than act as a passive audience. He flipped open the desk drawer, and the next instant the kaid found himself looking straight down the muzzle of a very large revolver. Behind the gun there was a short, stout man with blue eyes, so cold and so evil that one look into their depths made the words freeze in the kaid's throat.

"Ibrahim," said Langevin, and his voice was as gentle as a woman's, "you

are not invulnerable, no more so indeed than the mighty Ben Senussi. At this range I could crack his skull wide open, and yours is no harder than his."

His words fell one by one, quiet and precise. They had a magic effect upon the Beni-Yaffara—and so had that long barreled cavalry revolver of his, which, though it did not move by so much as a fraction of an inch, seemed to be pointing at the heart of every man present. For a moment the only sound in the room came from the flies buzzing about the blood spattered heads of the Legionnaires which lay, forgotten, on the floor.

"Before you make up your minds to rush me," Langevin went on, "be good enough, O Men of the True Faith—black hearted carrion that ye are—to glance behind you and take heed ere you set too great a store by that reward."

They stared at him and they stared at the gun. Not one of them moved.

"I shall not shoot while your heads are turned," he assured them. Then his voice rose sharp and compelling, "Look—or I shoot to kill!"

Ten heads pivoted around like weathervanes veering in a high wind. Behind them Belali was standing in the doorway with an automatic rifle hitched up on his hip. Judging by the look on his shiny black face, nothing would have pleased him better than to empty a clip of cartridges into the small of the backs of the Beni-Yaffara.

"Now," said Langevin, "you will listen to me as you listened to Ben Senussi."

But his words were wasted and he knew it. The one thing which held them in check was fear. Their brains had been addled by the splendid tales of loot and conquest which Ben Senussi's agents had dinned into their ears. They could not be made to believe that the French had not been defeated, and they wanted to join the victorious party while the joining was still good. Nevertheless, with one gun in front of them and another behind, they listened attentively to everything Langevin had to say.

"I shall give you one last chance," he concluded. "Go back to your villages, take council among yourselves, talk to your people. You know the risks and the penalties. Follow Ben Senussi to destruction if you wish. I can not stop you. At Shirak you fought like men—will you turn into hyenas now? Go find the answer in the streets of Ain-Hareb. When you have reached a decision come back and let me know. My head, I imagine, O Ibrahim of the greedy eyes, will be worth a thousand dourous tomorrow as well as today."

"*Sidi Capitaine*," exclaimed the kaid, a tremulous smile on his lips, "forgive me! Thou art my master and my friend. As Allah is my witness I meant no harm. Aye, we have been led astray, but thou art the Dispenser of all Wisdom and we walk again in thy footsteps in the ways of truth!"

"*Barka!*" rasped Langevin. "Enough! Now this is a test: when you come back, in proof of your submission, bring me, in chains, the men who were supposed to meet the convoy in the Taghzout Pass. Belali, open the door. About turn! File out!"

THEY went out, humble and meek as mendicant friars, calling down the unspeakable blessings of Allah and of his Prophet upon the valuable head of Captain Langevin.

And as soon as they were comfortably out of reach of the blockhouse, they turned in their saddles and poured a volley of bullets in the general direction of the building.

Their action had been foreseen by Langevin who, as soon as the door closed behind them, had climbed up into the small armor plated turret on top of the blockhouse. Armed with Belali's automatic rifle, he answered the Beni-Yaffara's random shots with a burst of fire which tumbled three men out of their saddles and brought down two other horses, whose riders, picking themselves out of the dust, ran like deer toward the gates of Ain-Hareb.

Readjusting his sights, Langevin opened fire again. Of the ten delegates who had waited upon him four reached the village.

Langevin clambered down the rungs of the ladder. For a moment the abrupt transition from sunlight to shadow blinded him.

"That ought to give us a breathing spell," he declared. "I hate half measures. When I fight I fight like hell. In the long run it is more economical. Belali, there's a bare chance. I want you to take a message down to El Tirane—Belali," he repeated sharply. "Ho, Belali!"

Then as his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-darkness, he caught sight of the Senegalese lying spreadeagled on the floor. A bullet, glancing off the side of the loophole, had crashed into the nape of his neck, breaking his spine.

Langevin looked down at the dead face.

"How long?" he asked himself. "Eight years. Started together—finished together. That is as it ought to be, I suppose. You're better off dead, Belali. This will be a messy business."

Whistling softly between his teeth, he dragged the body to one side and placed a tunic over the twisted face. Afterward he went to work, loading rifles and carrying supplies of ammunition up into the turret. Several times as he crawled past the embrasures in the parapet he was fired upon by marksmen lurking behind the rocks on the hillside. Their bullets clanged against the steel plated walls. He worked slowly, for the day was hot, and his left hand, wounded at Shirak, gave him a great deal of trouble. And all the while, as he toiled up and down the creaking ladder, the deep throated roar of the people of Ain-Hareb beat against his ears.

When his preparations were complete he filled his pipe and sat down to wait patiently for whatever fate might be in store for him.

The attack came shortly after the sun slid down behind the hilltops and a wash of luminous blue shadows filled the valley.

For an hour or more the noise coming from the village had been growing louder, more insistent, more ominous, punctuated by the staccato roll of war drums and the piercing shrieks of the women. The snipers, too, were more active. Bullets thudded against the walls of the blockhouse. Occasionally a slug found its way through one of the loopholes, punching ragged holes in the whitewashed walls, filling the rooms with clouds of dust.

All at once a dusky figure clad in white stood out against the black maw of the Ain-Hareb gateway. Other figures appeared, pouring out across the plain in a seething mass.

"Now this," Langevin said aloud, "is what I call style. *C'est très chic.* Five hundred to one, if I'm any judge. Every Beni-Yaffara in creation must be here."

He swung the automatic rifle into position, waited till the mob was midway to the blockhouse, then he let drive. The light was failing, and he wasted fully half a clip of cartridges before he found the mark. When he did so the results were immediate. A thick cluster of Beni-Yaffara toppled over, crushed down as though by the weight of an invisible hand. But the others, the great bulk of them, rushed on.

Langevin dropped the empty gun, snatched up another. Bullets whistled past his head, whirring off the stone rampart, clanging against the steel plated turret.

Not two hundred yards away, the Beni-Yaffara were closing in, strung out in a wide semicircle. They offered a shifting, difficult target for, in the shadows, their gray *djellabas* made them hard to see. Langevin pressed the stock of the rifle to his shoulder and squinted down the sights.

Before he could squeeze the trigger he was startled by a deafening burst of fire which, for a second, drowned out all other sounds. The right flank of the Beni-Yaffara buckled and sagged, shattered at point blank range. Confusion spread through their ranks as the hurricane of lead swept over them. And Langevin chose that particular moment, while they were bunched and almost stationary, to remind them that he was still alive. The chatter of his automatic rifle was lost in

the tumult of sound, but his shooting was excellent.

The warlike spirit of the Beni-Yaffara dwindled perceptibly. They had come out to murder one man; not to be shot to pieces by unknown and invisible enemies.

Some one shouted:

"The French! Allah protect us for the French have come back!"

It was enough to break up the party. Ben Senussi was not on hand to encourage his new allies. They rolled back toward Ain-Hareb, and as soon as they reached the protection of their own ramparts they poured a withering fire into the night, repelling non-existent French battalions conjured out of the darkness by their imagination.

There were no French troops within thirty-five kilometers of Ain-Hareb.

Langevin, tumbling down the ladder to throw open the door of the blockhouse to his rescuers, found himself confronted by a suspicious looking individual who, even in the dark, had none of the earmarks a French soldier ought to have. By the light of a match he caught a glimpse of a loose lipped, long shanked native, carrying a rifle in the crook of his arm.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he exclaimed angrily. "Ahmed Zogwar!"

HE DROPPED the match stick, and before it reached the ground he drove his fist into the native's face. Then he leaped backward and tried to slam the door shut, but Ahmed, who had dodged the blow, was too quick for him.

Locked together, they rolled on to the floor in the dust choked blackness, banging into furniture, kicking, gouging, tearing at each other. It did not last very long. Langevin fought desperately hard, but he was no match for his lithe, wiry opponent. He felt himself giving way and made a grab at the revolver holster strapped around his waist. Ahmed caught his wrist, gave his arm a tremendous twist which turned him over and flung him face downward on the ground.

Two bony knees weighed down on his shoulder blades, squeezing the last particle of air out of his lungs. He lay still. Under the circumstance he had very little choice in the matter.

"Sidi Capitaine," croaked Ahmed, "wouldst thou kill thy slave?"

Langevin was not in a position to answer this question. His mouth was full of blood and his brain was reeling dizzily.

"Aye," Ahmed went on, "must I fight my way across the threshold of thine house to bring thee news of my son?"

Still no answer.

"Sidi Capitaine!" Ahmed's voice was exultant. "The boy lives! He thrives! The scar is healing fast. No one but myself has changed his bandages, and I washed my hands each time I went near him even as thou didst order. *Incha' Allah*, he is cured! Soon he will be a man. And I made a promise, Sidi Capitaine; and I am come with my ninety men to keep that promise."

Inarticulate, choking sounds came from the back of Langevin's throat.

"What could I do?" pleaded Ahmed, raising his voice to make himself heard above the noise. "I know, Sidi, I know! I deserted thee in the Bou-Fathoum Pass. My heart was troubled and my faith, indeed, was small. I feared for my son's life. I thought, perhaps, some curse had been laid on him. Could I die childless, leaving no heir? No doubt I should have stood beside thee. But I was weak and I fled back to my son. And now my son lives, Sidi, and I am twice thy slave. My life is in your hands; it is yours to take."

Langevin's breathing was growing more and more labored.

"Have mercy, Sidi Capitaine," Ahmed implored. "I am punished enough. See, I have turned away from my own people; I have forsworn the cause of Ben Senussi, him they call the Deliverer, the Invulnerable. I have come straight to thee in thy peril, and with thee if needs be I shall die. Speak, Sidi, speak. There is no time to lose. They will come again in a little while, hunting for thy head. And

the sound of firing will bring the Deliverer —Ben Senussi, that is to say—hurrying down from the high hills. Speak, Sidi, before it is too late."

Langevin rolled his face sidewise, cheek to the ground.

"For God's sake, get off my back," he wheezed. "Get off quick!"

Ahmed climbed off his perch. Groping about in the dark he placed his rifle in Langevin's hands.

"It is loaded," he pointed out stoically. "If it is thy wish to put a bullet into my heart to punish me for my cowardliness I shall not raise a finger."

"You think," gurgled Langevin, "you actually believe Ben Senussi to be invulnerable?"

"I have seen his *burnous*, and a dozen witnesses have sworn to this truth. He is a *mahdi*—"

"He's a dirty little Algiers gutter snipe," Langevin retorted, "and about as invulnerable as you are. Take this confounded gun. I don't want it. Look here, Ahmed, how far can I trust you?"

"Thou art alone; the French soldiers have been beaten and driven off by Ben Senussi. I am poor; there is a price on thy head, yet I have placed my rifle in your hands, my rifle and my life and the lives of my ninety men."

"Then," concluded Langevin, "we can't stay here all night. We're going to take a long chance, Ahmed, a long, long, chance, and I don't think you'll be sacrificing as much as you might imagine. Let's get to work."

Five minutes later the Beni-Yaffara warriors saw a sheet of flame leap skyward. A tremendous explosion followed. It rocked the walls of Ain-Hareb and showered its inhabitants with stones and splintered timbers. When they went out to investigate they discovered that, where the blockhouse had stood, there was a deep pit out of which came a little smoke. Not a French soldier was anywhere to be seen.

And the people of Ain-Hareb, marveling at this fresh proof of Seyid ben Senussi's supernatural power, rejoiced greatly.

VI

IT WAS a little after two o'clock when Commandant Laisne switched on the light in the colonel's study.

Tergnier, who had been snatching a few minutes' rest on a sofa, propped himself up on one elbow and glared malevolently at his second in command.

He was fully dressed, even down to his spurs. Beside him, draped over the back of a chair, his belt and revolver holster were within easy reach of his hand.

"And now what?" he inquired. "What in the name of heaven do you want now? I lay down—I try to get a little sleep. But, no, it is out of the question. I must be disturbed. Always disturbed. Are there no problems you can handle without my help? Can't understand it! I'm surrounded by gaping dolts!"

He was never at his best on coming out of a sound sleep, and especially at two in the morning his outlook on life was likely to be jaundiced.

"A thousand pardons, *mon Colonel*," murmured Laisne, "but this, is a sense, is a matter which I think—"

"I don't want seconds in command who think!" shouted Tergnier. "I want seconds in command who know, who can reach decisions, who are not afraid of their own shadows, who can assume a trifling share of responsibility! Well, *gue diable?* What are you waiting for? Is it for the pleasure of fixing my features in your mind's eye that you arouse me in the middle of the night?"

Laisne gave a slight cough.

"I—er—have here a dispatch from G. Q. G. at Rabat," he explained. "It is an extremely important document, *mon Colonel*—one which will require your immediate attention."

"Again! Bombarding me with telegrams. The general's a fool. A dithering cretin. Ought to be stuffed and put in the war museum at the Invalides. That's where he belongs. Fossil. Give me that damn' message. Let me see what they've unearthed now."

He snatched the buff colored paper out of Laisne's hands and, jumping off the couch, strode across the room to his green shaded reading lamp.

"Long winded ass," he snorted, after a preliminary glance at the dispatch. "If they—"

Then the purport of the dispatch he was reading percolated through to his brain, and he made no more comments for quite some time. The exasperated, contemptuous look faded out of his eyes. He ceased to bristle, and all at once he seemed to grow bent and wrinkled and tired: a bewildered old man with a bad liver.

The tone of the dispatch was bad enough; what it had to say was even worse.

Writing with a pen dipped in acid, the powers that be viewed the situation at El Tirane with growing alarm. They were wholly dissatisfied with the results Tergnier had so far obtained. Nor did they understand why he had not taken more vigorous steps to repress the uprising, which was threatening to spread to other districts, and might seriously interfere with the lines of communication between Fez and Oudjda.

The Paris press was already in possession of certain facts regarding El Tirane, and immediate action was essential to avoid political repercussions which the resident-general would deplore. Grave charges were being made against the troops of occupation. They were accused of brutality and reckless disregard for the lives and rights of the natives. To avoid any further dissemination of such adverse criticism a parliamentary commission had been appointed, which would proceed to El Tirane to gather evidence at the first opportunity.

"That swinish reporter!" exclaimed Tergnier, crumpling the paper in his fist. "If I had him here—"

But he had to smooth out the paper, for that was only the first part of the message.

Adequate reenforcements, it went on, were being gathered under the orders of Colonel Joseph Adelin Roublelard.

Colonel Roublelard, on his arrival, would assume full command both of the 4th Battalion, 2nd Regiment of the *Légion Étrangère*, and of the El Tirane district.

Meanwhile the uprising called for energetic action. Within the next twenty-four hours Colonel Tergnier was to engage the enemy with all the units at his disposal and to cling to the enemy with the utmost tenacity, until a complete and final submission had been obtained from all the rebellious tribes.

"To relieve the pressure upon other districts," concluded the message, "and in order that our military reputation may be maintained unimpaired, the enemy must be pinned down at whatever the cost, and immobilized until the arrival of Colonel Roubelard's reenforcements."

"Roubelard!" Tergnier commented bitterly. "Sending him to relieve me. He was three grades beneath mine at St. Cyr!"

He ran his fingers through his stiff gray hair.

"It's a conspiracy, that's what it is. They knew this trouble was brewing and they sent me here to act as their scapegoat. That's the thanks I get—thirty years' service—kicked out. I suppose they'll try to put me in command of a forage depot."

Laisne sighed his commiseration. He felt genuinely sorry for his chief. Everything that could go wrong had gone wrong. The unrest had spread outward with the force of an explosion immediately after the victory at Shirak. It was Captain Langevin's fault of course. He ought to have kept closer watch on the border tribes. But Langevin had been swallowed up. Nor had the last convoy been heard of. All the passes were blocked. The countryside was in a state of chaos. Even El Tirane had tried to join the rebels. Half the town was in ashes. The battalion had been compelled to face a dozen different ways at once as raid followed raid, and the casualty list had been enormously swollen with nothing to show for it.

A SECTION of mountain guns and a hundred Legionnaires had been added to the garrison, but this driblet did not begin to fill the gaps. They were barely holding their own—and headquarters was ordering them to fight a pitched battle.

"I don't quite see—" began Laisne.

Tergnier rolled the message into a ball, dropped it on to the floor and kicked it. His back straightened, his eyes grew hard and bright. There was no trace left of his despondency.

"You don't, eh?" he grunted. "That doesn't matter, because I do. When I am given an order I obey like a soldier—like a man, without talking about it!"

And his lips, beneath the close cropped, bushy mustache, twitched miserably.

"They want me to fight!" he went on. "Do they think I have been sitting by the fireside drinking *camomille?* I'll show 'em. You'd expect those brainy fellows at Rabat to have a few elementary notions of strategy. Why, the poor fools can't even appreciate what I'm doing; a war of attrition, a war of maneuver. No, they can't see it. War's like chess; you've got to move slowly and carefully; feel out your opponent— But you've read that order, Laisne. They want us to rush in and fight regardless of the cost. All right, *bon Dieu*, we'll do it. We'll go in and clean them up as we did at Shirak; and if Roubelard has the temerity to claim any share in the victory I'll have him kicked out of every decent home in France."

The march of the El Tirane column is a matter of official record. In years to come it will serve to guide and inspire young officers who have heard the call of the far places of the earth. The romanticists who write the histories used in *écoles communales* will, no doubt, draw erroneous parallels between Colonel Tergnier's feat and the Greeks who fought at Thermopylæ. At the Legion's regimental depot drill sergeants will stimulate the ardor of dumb recruits with dramatic stories of the campaign.

But the stories the recruits will hear after hours in the regimental canteen, while sitting at the feet of blasphemous "ancients," will be, in a manner of speaking, a horse of a very different hue.

The battalion, with its transport and its battery of mountain guns left El Tirane at four hours' notice. Eleven hundred strong it marched into the hills with its flag uncased and the *clique* playing its famous song "*Partant pour la Syrie*," the finest and most immoral marching tune in the Legion's Rabelaisian repertoire.

They closed with the enemy's outposts that afternoon, not far from the wreckage of the lost convoy. The rebels were massed on the flank of the hill above the pass they were guarding. The mountain battery gave them a taste of high explosive and shrapnel at seven hundred meters, over open sights, and while the shells were still dropping the Legion went in with its bayonets.

The first assaulting wave, with twenty-odd kilometers in its legs, did not move fast enough to please Tergnier.

"Laisne," he declared, "I have commanded some queer outfits in my day, but I won't have it said I have ever been in command of a battalion of snails. If I don't come back you know what to do. Sink your teeth into their gullets—hold on!"

And he trotted out jauntily to lead the first wave into action. He climbed that hill, sword in hand, sitting bolt upright in his saddle, shouting to encourage his sweating, swearing men.

Later they said they heard him braying the chorus of "*Partant pour la Syrie*", but of this there is no proof. The racket was so overwhelming that he may possibly have been singing the "Jewel Song" from "Faust."

Midway up his horse collapsed; nevertheless he was the first man to reach the Chleuh, and his sword was hilt deep in a hillman's belly when the troopers came roaring up behind him.

The Chleuh is a stout fighter, but at close quarters he is no match for a crazy Legionnaire with a bayonet crammed on to the muzzle of his rifle.

Wedged in on the narrow ledge the two

lines swayed while the bayonets slid home into the quivering brown flesh and the gun butts crashed down on to the shaven heads. Then the Chleuh caved in. They went scrambling up among the rocks with the nimbleness of their own mountain goats.

Tergnier pointed after them with the stump end of his broken sword.

"That's a beginning, my little rabbits," he told his troopers. "But it's only a beginning. They're not going to get away from us. We'll run them off their feet. Fall in."

And that, as he said, was only a beginning. Thereafter the fight went on from day to day, rolling thunderously through the hills. There were little skirmishes, and night attacks by the blue-white light of the moon, and pitched battles in the white hot sun and the dust when the battalion was engaged to the last man. And always the rebel forces broke and sifted away before they could be hemmed in and hammered to pieces.

THE CAMPAIGN became a grim nightmare. Shoes, cut and torn by the jagged rocks, had to be held together with bits of string. Men went barefoot; their uniforms hung in rags. Half starved, filthy, unshaved, roasting by day, chilled to the bone at night, they marched incredible distances, fighting, dying, fighting again, doing what they had set out to do, keeping the rebels in the hills, forcing them away from the lowlands and the lines of communication.

In the wake of the column jackals waxed fat and sluggish. The sun, the bad water, the spoiled food accounted for more men than the Chleuh bullets. Troopers died in their tracks. They fell by the side of dim trails, in nameless valleys, and the dust cloud kicked up by trampling feet swallowed them up.

The survivors trudged on, led by a stiff backed scarecrow with a broken sword in the scabbard hitched up under his arm. They followed him without a murmur, carried away by his reckless courage and his amazing vitality. He was always in the thick of the fighting, a living banner, as grim an old colonel as ever charged at the head of his troops. He seemed to hunt out the hottest corners, exposing himself deliberately to the enemy fire, but the bullet had not yet been molded which was to snuff out his life.

The end came unexpectedly after a two-day battle in a titanic amphitheater hemmed in by great cliffs of red rock. On the northern edge of this amphitheater there was a fortified village set upon a slope which had been fashioned into a series of terraces. The terraces began where a spring gushed out of the side of the hill and went down in giant steps to the level of the plain.

Each one of these steps, carefully irrigated, was covered with a thick mat of vegetation, so that the slope was transformed into a lush, green garden set down in a tawny wilderness of stone and tawny rock.

This, according to the survey maps, was Ras-Ourirt, the Chleuh stronghold, at the very heart of the Tafilalet range.

"Have we pinned them down?" crowed Tergnier, holding the map in his palsied hands. "Have we got 'em by the throat? It's the first time in the history of the occupation that we've ever come within sniffing distance of this damn' place!"

Commandant Laisne was no longer present to echo the colonel's opinions. His bones were bleaching among the boulders at the head of the Bou-Fathoum Pass. The temporary second in command, a ranker captain with the jowled face of an amiable bulldog, looked longingly at the green terraces where the palm tree fronds nodded in the morning breeze.

"All things considered, *mon Colonel*," he remarked after a moment's thought, "we could do with a few fresh vegetables. A diet of corned beef isn't what I'd call healthy."

So the 4th Battalion went into action six hundred strong, and for two days it clawed and pawed and hacked its way from terrace to terrace. At first the Chleuh contested every inch of the way.

They fought doggedly, asking no quarter of their enemies, giving none, dying in their tracks—but their counterthrusts lacked their usual fury, and as the hours wore on their numbers seemed to decrease out of all proportion with their losses. Holes appeared in their defenses, holes into which the Legionnaires stumbled unexpectedly, groping about among the tree trunks and the squelching undergrowth on the alert for possible surprises.

Just before nightfall a few tribesmen came in and surrendered, the first rebels to lay down arms since the rebellion began. They were sullen and dispirited. Tergnier could get nothing out of them beyond the fact that they were sick of the fighting and wanted peace. When Ben Senussi's name was mentioned they looked as blank as stone walls and asserted they had never heard of him.

That night the troopers camped within range of Ras-Ourirt. At daybreak three hundred and fifty answered roll call and massed behind Tergnier to rush the village.

There was no artillery preparation for the mountain battery had used up its last shells long since. The walls were thick and stout. The gate, flanked by loopholed turrets, looked strong enough to withstand anything short of gun cotton. Tergnier turned to his men and laughed in their faces.

"Does it look like a tough morsel, my infants? It's full of rebels—but can it stop us? I ask you, can it stop us?"

They answered him with a yell.

"All right, my lambs! We'll put that damn' rag of ours on the ramparts. Come along the 4th Battalion! *A la bayonette!*"

Not a shot was fired at them, and as they neared the iron bound gates, the gates swung open and a solemn procession of elderly men came out to make their submission. They went down on their knees and bowed their heads in the dust, for the bottom had dropped out of the rebellion.

The Legionnaires planted their torn fanion on the ramparts; the Chleuh handed over their rifles, and a prodigious silence settled upon Ras-Ourirt basking in the sunshine.

Then, later in the day, when it was seen that the French did not butcher their prisoners, nor defile their womenfolk, nor burn, nor loot, other tribes flocked in to make peace with Tergnier and to stare in awe struck wonderment at his handful of barefoot, unkempt soldiers.

"And Ben Senussi?" Tergnier insisted. "What has become of him?"

The rebel kaids hung their heads. It was one subject they would not discuss. They had been led astray, they asserted, their brains had been addled with lies, but they had recovered their sanity and no longer wanted to wage any kind of war against the colonel's mighty warriors. Now that their faith in their cause had been destroyed they were scared stiff of those mighty warriors and they didn't mind admitting it.

"If these men can fight like such fiends," one man said humbly, "how could we hope to defeat the great army which is moving up behind you? We were told—may Allah consign his lying soul to the nethermost pit of hell—we were told that France was weak and could send no more men against us and, behold, a vast multitude swarms through our hills!"

It was the first intimation to reach Tergnier that Roubelard's outfit was somewhere in the offing.

When it arrived the following day he was ready for it, with his veterans—smelling abominably of fermented palm toddy—drawn up in review order, and the conquered chieftains massed four deep at the left end of the line.

Roubelard's first words were:

"*Bon sang*, my dear Tergnier, but you travel fast once you get going. My people are played out trying to catch up with you."

THEY came limping in, winding interminably across the plain—two battalions of Senegaleses Tirailleurs, their red fezzes bobbing, a squadron of blue cloaked cavalry, some engineers, a detachment of

Legionnaires, a section of mountain guns and a complete assortment of cooks, staff officers, signalers and transport.

There was even a party of civilians, the advance guard of the parliamentary commission, saddle sore, sunburned gentlemen very much the worse for wear.

The 4th snapped up to attention and presented arms as the relief column came in. What was left of the *clique*, four bugles and a pair of drums, hammered out the chorus of the regimental song.

Roubelard was very much impressed; every one present was very much impressed. The kaids were reviewed and interviewed, and everybody, even Roubelard, was compelled to admit that it looked very much as though the rebellion was really over.

A little later there was a banquet served in a large tent pitched beneath the trees. There were cigars and wine and champagne. There were speeches. Tergnier was toasted and cheered and toasted again. Monsieur the Deputy Garchette declared in his best platform style that his commission had already reached one important conclusion, namely that Colonel Tergnier had achieved imperishable fame. Beyond a shadow of a doubt he was a hero.

Tight jawed and bristling, Tergnier listened to the applause. He had accomplished one of the most spectacular feats in the annals of the Moroccan occupation —and he was out of a job. Roubelard, red faced and beaming, was in command now, while he, Tergnier, was finished.

"My dear Tergnier," said Roubelard, speaking through a cloud of cigar smoke, "my dear old fellow, I envy you." The champagne was making the party rather mellow. "You know what's going to become of you?"

"Half pay and be damned to you," grunted Tergnier. "You've got the best battalion that ever went barefoot, bar none."

He wiped his eyes with his napkin.

"Confound it! Crying! Best battalion in creation!"

"Commanding a battalion is all very well," admitted Roubelard, "but you're going up, *mon vieux*. You're climbing! *Bon sang*, you fooled us all. Sham attack at Shirak. Drew out your opponents and then you turned around and crushed them. Epic! Magnificent! You're headed straight for a chair at the war college. Lyautey himself never thought out anything more astute."

Tergnier finished his champagne and toyed with a glass of Grand Marnier. The future was beginning to look quite rosy. The past itself had lost most of its gloom. Now that Roubelard had explained things to him he was beginning to realize just how smart he had been. Clever fellow!

"And d'you know what started it all?" he inquired, draping one arm over the back of Roubelard's chair. "Tell you— a cursed intelligence officer—name of Langevin. Soft hearted, mushy sort of fellow. Dead now, poor brute. Ever heard about him?"

"Only what I found out at headquarters. They said—"

"Well, it's this way," Tergnier broke in, for the next few minutes he held his audience spellbound while he ripped Langevin's reputation to tatters. Not that he had any grudge against the man, he maintained, but there was no denying the evident truth that such officers did untold damage.

"If I'd let him have his way," he concluded, "Ben Senussi would be in Fez this minute. Force, that's what's needed. Smash 'em! It's the only policy. Make 'em know you're the master. Force broke this rebellion, and nothing but force!"

A commotion outside the tent broke in upon his discourse. The noise grew louder. An officer could be heard expostulating vehemently in corrupt Arabic Other voices joined in.

Roubelard pushed back his chair.

"This is intolerable," he declared "Why can't they keep order outside?"

"It's your funeral," chuckled Tergnier. "You're in command now, but in my time—"

"Leave it to me!" snorted Roubelard. He strode out of the tent followed by the other members of the party, who ambled along with cigars in their mouths and their hands in their pockets.

Their complacency received a severe jolt when they caught sight of the group gathered in front of the tent. Surrounded by a picket of Senegalese Tirailleurs stood a gang of ruffianly natives armed with French Lebel rifles which they refused to surrender even though an orderly officer was shouting at them at the top of his lungs.

The disarmament question, however, was really a side issue. The center of interest was a short, stout man clad in a disreputable *burnous* who held a lance in his hand. Impaled on the lance point was a head.

The parliamentary committee, which was not accustomed to such anatomical horrors, retired in confusion behind the tent.

"Take that head away from him!" barked Roubelard. "Name of a thousand thunders, who allowed these people into camp? If they're rebels, disarm them! If they won't disarm—shoot 'em down!"

Then the short stout man raised his voice and shouted in perfectly good, everyday French:

"Will somebody in authority kindly tell these halfwits to leave us alone? I am—"

"I don't care who you are!" thundered Roubelard. "I won't have that disgusting thing in my camp. It's crawling."

"It's Langevin!" exclaimed Tergnier. "Upon my soul, this is extraordinary! Roubelard, you hear what I'm saying? It's the intelligence officer I was telling you about."

"Oh," said Roubelard, and again he said "Oh—" because he could think of nothing else worth saying on the spur of the moment.

"Thank you, *mon Colonel.*" Langevin smiled. "This head isn't very pretty, I quite agree, but as it happens to be the head of our late lamented friend, Seyid ben Senussi—"

"Good God! You—"

"Yes, *mon Colonel.* We got him last week. Since then we've been in the show business, touring the villages to show 'em just how invulnerable Ben Senussi really is. And you might tell your Tirailleurs not to pester my people. They're entitled to their rifles. This man—" he laid his hand on the arm of a grinning native—"is Ahmed Zogwar, the new kaid of the Beni-Yaffara and the best friend we've ever had in the hills. But for him this rebellion would still be in full swing."

"The man's crazy," Tergnier spluttered. "Don't listen to him, Roubelard."

"Oh, you did your full share," Langevin conceded, "but make no mistake about it, *mon Colonel.* Seyid was the mainspring of the rebellion. It died when he died. You didn't have to lose a man. We joined Seyid's *harka,* and Ahmed and I—we caught him while he was asleep and cut his throat. After that—" he shrugged his shoulders—"naturally, the rebellion collapsed. There was no real motive behind it. A touch of hysteria, nothing more."

"I see," muttered Roubelard, looking at Tergnier out of the corner of his eye. "Yes, I see—at least I think I do. It's a different point of view, of course, Tergnier. Very different."

"It is," agreed Tergnier. "It's childish!"

"Still, you'll go to the war college. You have nothing to worry about. You're quite safe." He walked over to Langevin and took him by the elbow. "If you don't mind leaving that banner of yours behind," he said cheerfully, "I'd like you to come in and meet some of my officers. I'm Roubelard, you know, the new zone commandant—and you're the very man I've been wanting to meet. I've been hearing quite a lot about you at Rabat."

And Tergnier, watching them walk arm in arm into the tent, was filled with a sense of loss—until he bethought himself of the pleasant surroundings of the war college and of the rosette of the Legion of Honor which, very soon, would reward his gallant services.

The Boat

By ROBERT CARSE

A Powerful Tale of the Antarctic

RIGAR, the bearded boatswain, having waited his time, flung open the forecastle door and slammed it after him just on the first white slash of an advancing wave. The place in which he stood was evil smelling and dirty sea water gurgled about his seaboot knees as he made his way to the long mess table in the center. Here he could feel the full fury and force of the gale and it was hard to hear him above the creak of tortured beams, the thunder as liquid black mountain tumbled after black mountain down upon the trembling head of the ship.

But the men were not asleep; they were too nervous, too cold, and almost too weary to sleep. He had shouted just one word at them—

"Ice!"

It was sufficient to bring them sitting up in their bunks, pawing for briny sweaters, seaboot socks, oilskin trousers. Hands on hips, black pipe between his powerful teeth, he watched them as they piled out.

The old deep water stiffs, he saw with a certain grim humor, were more nervous and apprehensive than the kids, the Royal cadets. For the simple reason that they knew more; knew that, for days, the Old Man and the lieutenants had been navigating by dead reckoning alone, the wireless and both compasses cracked up and made practically worthless by that four hours' vicious blow to the north and east of Tristan da Cunha. The Old Man was a good navigator, and one jury compass still worked; but what could a man do when you could not shoot the sun for seventeen days on end?

"On deck, you!" growled Rigar.

Sometimes these aristocrats' sons, despite his long years of service with them, got on his nerves with their smiles, their quips and jokes at any old time. Look at young Hjalmar Bjornsen, there—laughing as the spray smacked him full in the face, shouting over his shoulder that he had never seen ice before—

"Run!" commanded Rigar. "Cast off!" And he flung himself first at the fore brace.

Then the great hidden sheet of pan ice was beneath her forefoot and she rose under it, twisting and murmuring. Out of the lightless gray pall aft bawled a command from the quarterdeck. They never obeyed it; the mainmast, jerked by that terrific strain as the giant old fullrigger struck the ice, gave without warning in the clamor and vibration of the gale.

A steel block, kicked clear from the mainskysail yard, hammered the canting deck at Rigar's feet, bounced, struck him a glancing and awful blow. He fell, darkness reaching up over his eyes. Back and side stays gave; the ship rolled; rolled again and men slid clutching from the icy decks.

Abaft the cook's caboose, in the waist of her, they had stowed a crate of live chickens when they had cleared from Rio and the Plate. In the gale off Cunha the chickens had died, and been gladly eaten, but the crate had not been cast overside; had been saved at the order of the senior lieutenant, as fuel for the forecastle stove.

Gasping, mad with fear, just free from the stiff, wet folds of the main course, young Hjalmar Bjornsen found that crate, torn loose from its ringbolt lashings and floating free. He was weak, very near death, for he had been given no chance to rid himself of oilskins and seaboots. His raw young hands found the stout slats of the crate. He crawled up, as far as he could. Then he jammed his hands downward between the slats, until they stuck there. It was his last conscious move for many hours.

A great aching throughout his body was his next sensation. For a long time he was afraid to open his eyes. When he did he saw nothing. The world was in darkness. But he could hear men about him: their mumbled words, their uneven breathing, their moans of pain, the death rattle of one. He put out his almost unfeeling hands, pawed to right, to left. He lay on moss covered rock. Some one, somehow, had saved him from the sea, from death.

He relaxed, slept. Hands upon his shoulders brought him awake. A man spoke to him in a hoarse voice, and he recognized dimly one of his brother cadets, Sven Maddo, standing above him.

"You live, then?" asked Sven dully.

"Yes. Where—?"

"It is a reef. Kroner, the lieutenant, brought us here in the longboat. We found you on the crate just after she sank. But Kroner—" Sven's voice cracked, stopped for awhile— "was drowned, landing us here. I slipped and—"

"Who else is here, Sven?"

"All are dead; lost with the ship in the sea, except you, me, Rigar, who is badly hurt, and three more."

"Help me up."

Sven dragged him to his feet. The other put his hands to his eyes, his forehead, his salt streaked face; then peered about him. The dark immensity of the sea cupped them in; waves broke in a bright welter, sending constantly a lash of spray up over the high ledge where they lay.

Two other men were moving, and he made them out as Kolvaag and Lenrik,

members of the regular crew, and old sailors. Seeing him, they shouted and beckoned. He came very slowly toward them, weaving through the big, loose boulders, white with penguin drippings.

"You are all right?" asked Kolvaag, squinting at him.

"I can walk."

"Call your mate, the other lad, then, and we'll go fish what we can from the sea."

But Sven Maddo was already stumbling in their direction and they went, the four, very carefully down the ledge and to where the waves clashed, frothed and retreated. Kolvaag found, cast far up and out of the waves' grasp, what he said was a piece of the mizzen topmast. To them, now, it was useless, except that it still had clinging to it a few fathoms of rope and wire they could employ.

KOLVAAG and his mate cleared, then made fast the stuff in one strong line; reeved a running bowline in the end of it, passed it about a boulder. Around his waist Lenrik belayed the other end, then was cautiously lowered by his mate down into the sucking recoil of the breakers. The others stood just above him and, at his signs, rushed down as a wave swept back and dragged forth to safety what he had found there.

The ship, howled Sven in Hjalmar Bjornsen's ear once, had foundered some three miles off, right out in there. The dead lieutenant, then in command of the one ship's boat to get away, had been forced to run before the gale, and they had come across this place, could not sheer off so as to miss it, even if they had so wished.

Now from out of the sea they could salvage a few things. But what they got was pitiful. In a few moments they were exhausted, could tug and drag through the suck of the retreating seas no more. They had the smashed hulk of the ship's dory, the canvas boat cover still holding miraculously; plenty of wood and wire, halyard, down haul and brace ends; and almost half of the jigger lower topsail. That was all.

And that was all, decided old Kolvaag, who led them, that they could possibly get now. Lenrik, his mate, had been badly beaten by the seas and was bleeding from the ears and mouth when they hauled him up and out from where he had stood in the surf. Kolvaag stared up at the metal dark sky.

"It'll break," he muttered. "The wind's swinging and slacking. If we get more when it's calm, we get more. That's all. Come, you lads, bear a hand here."

"Look!" cried Sven Maddo at his shoulder. "Look—what is that?"

All but Lenrik, who was too weary and ill to care, swerved and stared. With a growled curse old Kolvaag put down his roughly clewed-up bolt of canvas and stalked down the rocks. He came back from the edge of the surf bearing a man in his arms, put that man down. They gaped as the old sailor rolled the corpse over.

The face was terribly battered in, the features unrecognizable. But, by the tremendous, square cut beard, the four wide gold stripes on the long ulster, they saw in him the captain of the training ship, their commander. A sort of half cry, half groan, came from Sven Maddo; his father and the dead man had been life long friends; had been, years ago, Royal cadets together.

Old Kolvaag shook his head.

"Ain't no place to bury him here. And—" His voice trailed off, caught at by the gale's scream. He reached out, brought up the body, started down the rocks of the ledge again. Vaguely, they could hear him mumble as he left them—

"He'd like it better this way, anyhow."

The inrushing dark seas roared over the body, roared back the way they had come, lifting for a moment to their tops the body of the square bearded man.

"Come on," said Kolvaag in a harsh voice, lifting his bolt of canvas. "We must make a shelter from the wind and cold, or we will all die."

Stumbling one against the other

stupidly, they went on up the ledge to where Rigar and the other wounded man lay. There Kolvaag showed them how to unfurl the salt stiff canvas, secure its corners with boulders and crawl beneath it. They placed the wounded men in the middle, side by side, formed a small and tight ring of their own bodies for warmth. They drowsed on the icy basalt, chilled through with cold, murmuring in their pain.

When at last they found the energy to rouse one another and get up, the gale was spent and a gray, cold rain drove against them. Rigar, they saw, was conscious; and the other wounded man, Larsen, the ship's sailmaker, dead, mouth and eyes open, snuff blackened teeth bared in a fixed grimace of pain. Kolvaag and Lenrik took hold of the dead man, disappeared with him toward the edge of the small cliff. They returned, carrying all his clothes.

Of the shirt and stout corduroy trousers they made bandages and splint wrappings for Rigar's head wounds and fractured leg. The rest they distributed equally. Young Hjalmar Bjornsen, shuddering, flung down what they handed him, calling them ghouls in a cracked, high voice. They stared at him sullenly and did not answer. Then the two old sailors knelt down beside the bearded boatswain and talked in low voices.

Rigar had matches in a deep trousers pocket, held watertight in a celluloid case. So they would have fire, after they had dried out enough seaweed against their bodies. The boatswain at once ordered them to bring him some; while they worked, building a shelter out of the canvas and spar ends, he could dry a handful or so under his arms.

They dragged over thirty boulders into two roughly parallel lines. Transversely, they laid the shorter bits of spars and wood flotsam from the foundered bark. Over that they placed the thick and stiff sailcloth, anchoring it down with boulders on the corners and ends. The result was a fairly satisfactory shelter, which would at least keep out wind and water, if not the stabbing cold. Later, Rigar said, they could chink up the holes and openings around the place with wads of seaweed. But now they must think about fire, and then food.

AFTER hours of slow work and waiting, Kolvaag put a match to the first bundle of thoroughly dried seaweed. It did not catch; the stuff charred blackly, and the match went out. A small, wistful sigh came from Sven Maddo, whose teeth had been chattering uncontrollably for hours. The others made no sound, hunched a bit closer as Kolvaag laid a fresh match to another portion of the seaweed.

This time small blue-green flame came forth. At once Lenrik tenderly laid on dry fragments of wood he had pulped out between two boulders. Smoke swirled thinly; the small flame subsided, flickered, and then caught at the wood. Fire—They reached forth their hands as if already an appreciable warmth were spreading from it.

In a few minutes the place was full of acrid smoke from the slightly damp wood, and they choked and coughed where they sat about the fire.

"How about that, Bosun?" asked Kolvaag of the inert Rigar.

"Either we got to cut a hole in the roof to let out the smoke, right here, or you got to leave up that flap at the open end. If we do it here, no part will be warm, and the rain will come in. It always rains in this country—so lay back the flap at the other end."

"That will let the cold in, Bosun," murmured young Sven Maddo, his white, finely chiseled face between his hands.

"Some cold won't hurt. And all that smoke will make us dopey, choke us up. It will be fairly warm here by the fire, anyhow."

"How about food, Bosun?"

"Ain't there any molly hawks, any penguin, around?"

"Yes, I saw a few," answered Kolvaag, nodding his heavy but small featured head. "How about water?"

"Make a bucket, you thick farmer, out of some of that spare canvas, and dip the rain water off the hollows on the roof."

"Will it always rain?"

"Almost always, or snow. Now, shut up." Rigar's face was rigid with agony, his lips blue. "I'm almost out of my nut with that leg now."

None of them wanted to leave the warmth and solace of the slow burning fire, but Kolvaag, a big man with immense native strength, dragged them forth. He set Lenrik and Maddo to making two canvas buckets, to collect the rain water, and took slim, dark Bjornsen off with him to kill the sea birds clustered whitely on the other side of the big ledge.

They were able to kill three young, careless molly hawks and a penguin with the small stones they heaved, but then the rest of the birds rose up, in a babel of hoarse cries and thrashing of wings, out over the sea and to safety. The two, carrying their prizes, went back to the shelter. There, Lenrik and Maddo had finished one crude but watertight bucket and were beginning the second, using big grommets of wire cable, single spliced by the old sailor, for hoops and handle.

An hour later they ate their first meal. The sea bird meat was stringy, almost unpalatable because of its strong taste, and illy cooked. They ate all of it, crunching the bones between their teeth. When they were done and had drunk of the brackish rain water, Kolvaag asked of Rigar, now feeling a bit better—

"How do we stand, Lars?"

Rigar's blunt fingers stroked his beard.

"We're all right. They'll find us, in time. But it'll take months. Losing that wireless off Cunha was bad for us. This could be a lot worse."

"Where are we?" asked Sven Maddo softly, from where he sat behind the other men.

"About halfway between hell and nowhere, lad, and some few knots, one way or the other, from the 42nd parallel. Between Africa and the Argentine, and good and south—"

"But who'll find us here?" It was Lenrik, a flat faced little man, who asked it. "No ships run these lines."

"Some do. Whalers and sealers. But you're right; not many. I ain't holding out any false hopes to you. But I'm banking on Old Whiskers—Christopherson. Remember him, Kolvaag?"

A grunt came from Kolvaag, and the other men looked about, smiling for the first time. They had forgotten that, forgotten Old Whiskers, the famous former skipper of the training ship, who had taken the big five masted bark over this same course on four previous cruises before he had swallowed the anchor and given over his command to his mate.

"But that'll be months, at least," reminded Rigar from his position close to the fire, telling himself that men who were elated by hope often became bitter and unruly when that hope did not materialize. "Five, six, seven months, easily. Be sure of that, lads."

"But, Bosun," spoke up Hjalmar Bjornsen suddenly, "the old ship's dory is out there; we hauled her up from the surf. Her bottom's all cracked in, and her sweeps and row locks are gone, but the cover is still intact, and could be made into a sail, and maybe we—"

"You would use your nose for a compass, lad? And sea birds for stars? Crossed sticks for a sextant?"

Hjalmar Bjornsen moved his bruised hands in his lap.

"But we—"

"Would all die in her, Bjornsen's son, even if we could fix her, caulk her, rig her with a sail and sweeps, get her in the water without smashing her up and losing our own lives. Rest easy, and wait for the seals to come, so we can get some real food; and sleep, and dream of what heroes we'll all be when we get back home. Now stow it, all of you; I want to sleep."

Rigar hunched up his uninjured shoulder to protect his eyes from the fire's glow and seemed to drop again into sleep. Kolvaag judiciously laid a new and soggy piece of wood on the fire, also lay down, twisting his body about to get all of the

little comfort afforded by the basalt. Lenrik was already asleep or in a new stupor, flat, small face forward on the torn knees of his oilskin trousers.

The two Royal cadets, neither of them twenty years old, neither with more than four months of sea service behind him, looked slowly, searchingly at each other. It was Hjalmar Bjornsen, whose father, a newly made captain, had died in a gale off the Skaggerak, who nodded toward the low, smoke darkened door. Maddo silently followed him outside.

They kept on through the cold gusts of the rain until they came to where the wrecked dory lay, a white skeleton, on the black rock of the ledge.

"This can be done," said Bjornsen to the other, "and that. We do not need all those thwarts. They can be taken out and used to replace the smashed side planks. The keelson can come from that old hatch board over there—"

Maddo shook his head.

"With what will you work, Hjalmar?"

Hjalmar Bjornsen laughed, licking the rain drops from his lips.

"I'll make an ax—out of this rock. I'll make a knife out of that iron boom collar on the mizzen pole. When the seals come, I'll have rawhide for my thread, bone for my needle, and will make as neat a spritsail as you ever saw out of that boat cover. Then, I'll—"

"Those other chaps, Kolvaag and Lenrik, they will not help you. They are content to wait for the rescue ship."

Bjornsen leaned a bit toward his mate, his eager young face suddenly grave.

"What if she does not come, Sven?"

Sven Maddo did not want to confront that question now.

"But," he asked in answer, "how will you launch the boat, should you be able to rebuild it?"

The tall boy looked down the black and jagged cliff to where the breakers eternally groaned and smashed.

"That will come in its time. First, it is the boat. Those others, those old ones, Sven, they did it—the Icelanders, Leif the Lucky, Eric the Red. They who went to America. They had no compass, no sextant, no chronometer; and their boats were much like this, when we will have it done. You'll help me?"

He had made his case quite strong, quite appealing.

"Yes! And then when we get home, we will be famous men!"

Hjalmar Bjornsen made no reply; he was already searching the ground for sharp edged stones which would serve his purpose. At last they found a few and set to making handles for them from fragments wrenched and cracked from the spar ends piled there. It was hard work; their cold hands moved clumsily; time and again they bruised themselves until the blood came. Bjornsen was single stranding a down haul end to be used to lash his handles to their stone heads when the other suddenly announced:

"It is snowing. It is too cold to work and, anyhow, you can not see. I am going to the fire."

He looked at his companion as he spoke, but Bjornsen did not raise his head from his work. For a moment Maddo hesitated, half indignant, half penitent. Then his anger conquered, and he clumped off in his leaky seaboots over the rocks toward the shelter. As he dropped to his knees to crawl through the low entrance he looked back. Hjalmar Bjornsen worked on, head bent over his task.

Rigar was dying; he told them so after that night, recognizing the signs. One of his smashed ribs had somewhere punctured his lungs. His leg, broken and bruised against the rocks, had swelled and turned a blackish color. Septic poisoning was setting in there . . . His companions were rough forecastle hands and inexperienced cadets, but they fought death desperately for him.

Sven Maddo remembered that there was a large iodine content in seaweed; he squeezed out the little brown pods on to a rag ripped from his shirt, applied it, soaked after much work, to the wound. But the poison had already taken hold and begun to react violently and the antitoxin was not strong enough.

Rigar survived three more days and two more nights. The last night Hjalmar Bjornsen sat beside him to tend his needs while the others slept. The bearded man lay on a soft pile of dried seaweed they had collected for him, body turned to the slow heat of the fire, although the sweat of his fever poured down his hairy, cadaverous face.

From time to time great convulsions of pain shook him and he writhed to and fro, hands fluttering, and the boy would be forced to lean over and quiet him with a long, steady grip on both shoulders. The worst convulsion came near dawn. It ended with a lung hemorrhage, left him gasping, open eyed and aware that death was now not far off.

He looked up at Bjornsen with a clear gaze.

"Still working at your boat, lad?"

"Yes, Lars; but don't talk. Save your strength."

The shadow of a smile came about the bearded lips.

"Nothing to save it for now, Bjornsen's son," he whispered. "Keep—keep on at that. Don't let them—"

He could not go on; another burst of terrible coughing convulsed him. The pale clear gray eyes began to glaze over; the breath rasped very slowly. The cadet held up a wooden water dipper he had fashioned out, then put it down, slopping the contents on the basalt. Rigar was dead.

Hjalmar Bjornsen covered the face with a bit of sailcloth, awoke the other men gently to tell them. Kolvaag and his mate cursed and shook their heads; it was a hell of a life, a sailor's— Sven Maddo said nothing, took one glancing look at the stiffly postured dead man and went wordlessly out into the night, his hands twitching at his sides, his lips caught hard between his teeth. Against one of the wall boulders of the shelter he sat down, arms about his knees, head lowered against the soft white flutter of the Antarctic snow.

He was weeping unrestrainedly when Hjalmar Bjornsen came forth, a bit nervous, to find him.

"Come out of it, Sven!" he muttered, putting his hard, long fingered hand on Maddo's shoulder. "It's good he died so soon; he was in awful agony."

Sven Maddo, wiping the tears from his white face, moved his head.

"It's not that," he said slowly.

"What the hell is it, then?" asked the other, squatting down beside him.

"Olga."

"Olga? Oh—she'll be there when we get back. Anyhow, don't get too serious about her worrying over you."

"That's just it. She didn't want me to make this trip. Didn't want me to start sea going. But, my family, you know; and then there's that chap—that clerk, Holmgang, in the Swedish embassy. She always felt soft toward him, anyhow, even after I gave her the ring."

Bjornsen abruptly stood up. He jerked the other man by the collar of his yellow oilskin jacket.

"Get up!" he snapped. "You're no man; you're no sailor! You've got as much guts as a louse! Get those ideas out of your head and keep them out. If you don't, you'll, you'll—" he jerked a shoulder toward the black sea— "end up with the rest of them, out there. Now, come help me with the boat and forget it!"

For a few paces Maddo followed him. Then he stopped.

"It's too cold out here," he mumbled. "There isn't enough light to see yet. I haven't eaten. I'm going back, Hjalmar."

Bjornsen knocked him sprawling with an open handed blow to the face. He walked on, not looking back. In a sort of sullen, perverse rage he found his crude tools, cleared the snow from them, from the half hewn beam he was trying to convert into a spritsail mast and went to work.

He worked until his undernourished body could stand no more, dropped his stone adz and hammer. But a warm glow of elation was on him: the thick beam, once a part of the big five-mast bark, needed but a few more hours work before it would be finished and a serviceable mast. He plodded through the steadily

falling snow, dropped to his knees and crawled into the shelter.

Although it was after eleven o'clock in the morning, the three men slept like dogs, inertly. Rigar's body was gone. His seaweed couch was occupied by Kolvaag and, in a little pile close to the fire, lay all of the dead man's clothes. Four, remaining out of sixty. And how long would they four last? Of one thing he was certain, he told himself; he would not die in this bleak place, but fighting the sea, facing toward home and in his boat.

THE NEXT week the seals came. Kolvaag discovered them—a large pod crawled up from the sea on the other side of the ledge. They were, shouted Kolvaag, running toward them excitedly, fur seals, big, and fat. Hurriedly they made rude wooden lances and clubs, took Bjornsen's precious knife, adz and ax.

Then they crept through the snow from boulder to boulder, from hollow to hollow, until all four of them lay on the lip of the ledge, looking down. The pod had come up from the sea and squatted, weary from their immeasurable swim, on a lower basalt shoulder of the ledge. Inshore and closest to the men was a mother seal with two of her young; the big tusked male, a fierce animal, was nearby.

None of the four men had ever hunted seal, but Kolvaag had once been watch mate with a Russian who had worked in the Bering Sea ships, and he had learned from him some of the methods of attack. His plan, as whispered to the other three, was very simple: they were to isolate that family of four from the others and from the sea, then slay them.

Standing up, Kolvaag hurled his rude spear; impaled the mother seal at the base of the head. He sprang down, yelling, Lenrik slipping after him, to cut off the huge male and the two young, all moving swiftly toward the sea. The male charged directly at Lenrik. The little man lost courage, jumped aside and back, after ineffectually hurling the stout, stone headed spear he held.

But from two sides Hjalmar Bjornsen and Kolvaag came in. Bjornsen's ax cleaved clean and deep. The big beast lashed out, swerving. Kolvaag battered with his stone club, time and again. One of the young seals, stupefied by what had happened to his mother, stayed by her side and was savagely killed by a wild series of blows delivered by Maddo, who shuddered as he struck. The rest of the pod had flung off into the sea, to merge with the dark slate color of the waves and go from sight.

About that, growled out Lenrik, now very bold and cocky, they did not care; they had enough meat and fur to last the four of them for months.

Kolvaag had brought a few fathoms of line coiled about his waist. With it they dragged their prizes over the snow to the shelter. At once, for they had not had a real meal in ten days or so, they went to work.

They carefully banked the fire, got a red glowing bed of embers and there roasted a big, dripping steak. They ate till their jaws were lame from chewing the stringy, rich tasting meat. Then fell asleep, the dried blood stiff and reeking on hands and clothes.

In the middle of the night a wild scream brought them up, gaping. Sven Maddo, in the throes of an awful nightmare, screamed three times more before hulking old Kolvaag knelt roughly on the small of his back and shook him awake.

"What the hell is the matter with you!" he roared, indignant that he had been so frightened out of his precious sleep. The white faced boy blinked and twitched his lips. Finally, he spoke:

"I woke up, just a bit, I guess," he shuddered, "and saw the blood on my hands and dreamed I'd murdered a man; murdered you, Kolvaag."

"Me!" barked the old sailor. "Murdered me, huh, you weak, witless swab!" He punched the prone boy evilly at the base of the brain. "Take that, and may it change your foolish ideas!"

"Kolvaag!"

The sailor swung around. Hjalmar

Bjornsen was glaring at him with hot eyes.

"You hit that lad again, you'll answer to me, you dog!"

"To you—so?" asked Kolvaag, and got up in a sort of half crouch in the low shelter.

"To me; yes," Bjornsen answered. The vague firelight caught on the blood crusted basalt ax in his right hand.

Kolvaag looked down, at his feet. One of the stone clubs lay there. His right hand made a darting movement—to stop at his knee. The basalt ax had been lifted shoulder high. A similarly started blow had killed a male seal . . .

Kolvaag stumped over to his seaweed couch, dropped down upon it. Lenrik, about to speak, coughed and relaxed also. The four were silent, although no one of them slept again that night.

A WEAK sun broke through the low snow clouds about noon the following day, and in its warmth and light they salted and stretched the sealskins, quartered, smoked and salted the rest of the meat, cached it in a rock cairn they built in a corner of the shelter.

Hjalmar Bjornsen was working on his boat late that afternoon when Kolvaag rolled over the snow covered rocks toward him. For a time he stood in silence, hands on broad hips, watching the painfully slow work go on.

"What are you going to do with it when it's done?" he asked at last.

"Sail it."

"Sail it where?"

"Home."

"How?"

The cadet stopped his hollowing out of the mast step and looked up at the other man.

"Bear me a hand, you and Lenrik, once in awhile, and maybe you'll find out how."

Kolvaag tugged at his newly grown and dirty beard. He smiled.

"You think that cock eyed tub will keep afloat?"

The tall cadet flushed, putting down his knife and hammer.

"You think a relief ship will come for us? Now get to hell away from here and let me work! You and your mate will loaf on your hams, and get fat, and let me build this. When it's done, and you're quite sure no relief ship'll ever find us, you'll come whimpering on your hands and knees to me, to have me take you along when I push off. You call yourself a deep water sailor, you greasy roach! Shove!"

Kolvaag was a rough, powerful man, and had never considered himself a coward. But now he only smiled, heeled around and shuffled off toward the shelter, the comfort of the fire, his seaweed couch and small, delicate morsels of fresh roasted seal meat. If, after a good interval, the relief ship did not show up, they would be forced to head out themselves, in whatever sort of craft they could find or make. Meanwhile, sleep, eat, keep warm, and let the fool lad work on.

He crawled into the shelter. Lenrik slept, as usual, drugged into a kind of apathy by the smoky atmosphere, too much food, too little exercise and an unchanged diet. Kolvaag felt the same apathy, but had a bit more will power and brains, and exercised occasionally so that he would throw off some of the body poisons gained through the life they led.

In the dark corner behind the fire crouched Sven Maddo. He did not look up when the sailor came in, did not raise his eyes, and the vague, low mumbling of his voice kept on. Kolvaag heard a girl's name, repeated time after time, then a broken jargon of love words, an appeal for forgiveness, hardly audible, ended by a sob of choked weeping.

Kolvaag grunted to himself as he huddled down by the fire to turn his bit of seal meat. In a few days now they would have another pair of spare seaboots and oilskins, and one less mouth to feed. Who cared? The lad was a weakling and no good, anyhow; had been the clumsiest cadet aboard ship.

He smacked his lips over the salted, warm meat, wiped his beard, drank from the wooden water dipper Hjalmar Bjorn-

sen had made. The fire was low and needed fresh wood, but it was getting dark outside, and that cocky boat building lad would be in pretty soon for his supper. He'd fix it; he always did. Kolvaag slowly inhaled, let go a peaceful snore.

Hjalmar Bjornsen was the first to awake in the morning; he crawled to the door and out into the drifts, to wash his softly bearded face, his bared chest, with handfuls of snow. He laughed at the exhilarating shock of the snow against his warm skin; he had never been so healthy in his life. Then, replacing his flannel shirt and sweaters, the sealskin *parka* he had cut and sewn for himself, he went back into the shelter.

The other three still slept. For a moment, standing crouched above, he studied them. Kolvaag and Lenrik were fat and unhealthy looking, faces covered with pimples and small boils, due to their lack of exercise and slovenly physical habits. Sven Maddo, who in the last two weeks had eaten next to nothing, was white skinned, almost tubercular looking.

He leaned down and shook the other cadet softly by the shoulder. Maddo started up, hands groping, mouth open.

"Hjalmar!" he cried. "God, you scared me!" He attempted to grin. "I had a dream last night . . . Olga, my Olga, is leading a rescue party here now, to save us. Yes, she went herself to the king and got a fine ship—a cruiser—and an airplane. Yes, I saw it as plain as I saw you now. I must go out to meet her. She—"

Bjornsen gripped him by both shoulders, shook the thin lad until his teeth chattered.

"You're full of bilge, Sven!" he growled. "And you know it! Go out and wash your face in the snow and get some sense back into your head. Then come and give me a hand with the boat."

Maddo shambled upright, turned a vague stare on his companion.

"You don't think," he muttered, "that she's coming, then?"

"Not your girl— No, you damn' fool. Of course not. But a relief ship is. Either from Rio, or from Adelaide; one place or the other. Go out, now!"

Maddo did not answer. He stumbled down the smoke drifted place to the entrance, crept forth. Hjalmar Bjornsen shook his head; Sven was getting muddle witted. If he didn't watch out, the kid would be off his tap completely. He went to the rock cairn in the corner, took forth a small, salted slab of meat for the morning's breakfast. As he fixed it on the wooden spit over the fire, he heard a vague shout from outside.

He dropped the meat and ran. The path he followed went toward the cliff and had been freshly churned through the drifts.

"Sven!" he yelled commandingly. "Sven Maddo!"

Then he saw the other, hands upraised over his head, teetering on the lip of the cliff, close beside the signal mast they had erected. Hearing the shouts behind him, he turned, just for a moment.

"She's there—out there, Hjalmar! I just heard her voice calling me. I'm going to her. I am—"

He dived.

LATER, Kolvaag and Lenrik told him about it; they had found him, lying face down in the snow, close beside the place where the crazy lad had flung himself into the sea. He, Bjornsen, had been like dead; had not moved, had not spoken, for two solid days. This was now the third day, and thank God he seemed sane, back on deck again.

Bjornsen nodded, very slightly.

"Give me some food and water, Kolvaag," he muttered.

The two sailors looked over his bowed head at one another.

"Plenty of fresh snow water, lad, but, as far as food goes, we're running pretty low. There ain't been a seal or sea bird around this place in weeks."

"Give me just a bit, then."

Kolvaag did so. The cadet ate and drank.

"How much is there left?" he asked.

"About twenty-five pounds of meat—and it's as stiff and hard to eat as the rock you're sitting on."

"Probably. Have you thought to search the place for sea birds' eggs?"

"No, by God, we haven't."

"Go do it, then!"

Kolvaag scowled shortly.

"How about you, youngster?"

"I've got work to do on the boat."

"To hell with your boat!" broke forth Lenrik harshly. "You couldn't sail that tub a hundred fathoms before she scuttled and sank! I was tempted a couple of times while you were sick to put an ax to it. We're getting to need firewood around here."

"Sailor," pronounced Bjornsen slowly, "it's lucky for you that you didn't. Are you off your head? All that the folks ashore know is that after one wireless message from us, four hundred miles out from Rio, they never heard from the ship again. Just about now, I guess, they're beginning to think she's lost, for we're long overdue in Adelaide. A fine chance any relief ship has of finding us—from Cape Horn to Capetown, and back, that's where they'll have to look. And this damn' place is on no chart; no man probably ever saw it before. You stupid swine—"

He got up. Kolvaag and Lenrik gaped at him.

"My God, fellow," blurted Kolvaag, "don't talk like that. We'll all go off our heads unless we got some hope to hang on to."

Hjalmar Bjornsen laughed without sound.

"Hope is all right, and we could be a whole lot worse off than we are. But you guys have loafed enough. Get out and hunt your food."

He left them sitting there. A few minutes later, as he bent over his task of securing a seal bone cleat to the after gunwale, he saw them clump off through the drifts, dressed in many furs and moving slowly, almost reluctantly. They were afraid to think, those two, he told himself bitterly, seeing his brittle bone cleat snap in jagged bits against the wood. They lacked courage; they lacked initiative. They were not able to— Oh, to hell with them! Let them go their way. Here was his job. Here was the boat, which he must finish. Patiently, he went about making a larger, heavier cleat.

Three weeks passed. Their supply of food was down to less than ten pounds of rancid seal meat and a half dozen rotten penguin eggs. The two sailors had carefully combed the ledge in every direction and for two days Bjornsen had given up his all important work on the boat and gone with them. There was nothing to be found. Birds and seals had, seemingly, learned the danger of the reef and had not returned.

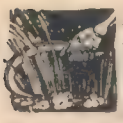
Kolvaag and Lenrik refused to waste any more precious energy, arouse any more hunger by unnecessary exercise. They sat stupidly in the shelter all day about the pitiful warmth of the fire, mumbling in their beards, recalling tremendous meals they had eaten in the old days when back from a trip with a huge hunger and a big pay-off to satisfy it.

Hjalmar Bjornsen saw little of them; his own courage, his own initiative, was gradually leaving him, and he knew that if he stayed with them long he would sit as they did, waiting apathetically for salvation, or for slow death. He kept on at the boat, unable to do much, for he was quite weak from lack of food and the numbing cold, but content as long as he was close to it, could place his hands upon it, and do some little thing every day, if it was nothing more than the making of a back splice in the end of a halyard or painter.

So it was that he completely missed what happened inside the shelter on the ninetieth day of their presence on the reef. Kolvaag he saw once during the afternoon, as the squat sailor emerged from the shelter for a short time, to wander aimlessly about the edge of the cliff and the signal mast, searching the hazy horizon for smoke or topsails, then to go back in again. Lenrik he did not see all afternoon.

But when at sundown he crawled into the shelter, he found Lenrik's stiff and contorted body not a yard from the entrance. Bjornsen only waited long enough to make sure the man was dead, then sought for Kolvaag. The place was dim with smoke, illumined only by the dull ember glow of the fire. He did not find Kolvaag until he was right on top of him.

The man lay close up against the little stone food cairn. In his hand was a scrap of roasted meat, and in his back, up to the haft, was a seal bone knife. He was quite dead, had been so for almost an hour, as far as it was possible to judge. Bjornsen rolled him over: the sailor's mouth was jammed full of the meat he held in his hand. He had been killed in the act of eating. But, how? What was the sequence of the two deaths? The cause?



BJORNSEN built up the fire with wood soaked in seal blubber. Then, very carefully, he examined the two dead men, their wounds, and the clotted blood stains on the floor. With that to aid him it was not hard to reconstruct the crime. Lenrik, while both he and Kolvaag had been asleep in the nights past, had been stealing meat from the food cairn, and either eating it at once, or hiding it. That was obvious from the bare pound or so of meat left in the place; according to the ration schedule they had worked out, there should have been at least twelve pounds.

Kolvaag, suspecting Lenrik's thefts, had examined the food cairn during one of his mate's rare absences. Then he had tempted the other by going out himself, probably with the statement that he was going to search for seal or penguin. He had returned unexpectedly and caught Lenrik in the act of rifling the cairn; had battered the man's head and back with a stone club.

Lenrik had crawled, obviously dying, toward the door, leaving a wide trail of blood behind him. Halfway there he had slipped prone, unable to go any farther. For a time Kolvaag, squatting before the food cache, terrible club in hand, had watched the other man. Then his own hunger had broken forth; he had started to eat the meat Lenrik had pulled out.

By that act he lost his life. For Lenrik, dying slowly and aware of it, had crawled back, tugging himself inch by inch over the moss covered rock. In his belt was a sharp, cruelly long seal bone knife. In one last convulsive but sure gesture he had buried the knife full up to the hilt in Kolvaag's back. And then he had dragged himself toward the door to try to call out to the third man for help. There, where he lay now, he had died.

To Hjalmar Bjornsen, who had lived with these men so intimately and so long, the shock was almost unbalancing. These men—friends and watch mates for years—had done this. He staggered, brain numb and reeling, out from the place, away from those bodies to the boat.

There he slept the night, huddled beneath the thwarts, the spritsail spread over him loosely. With wakefulness came sanity. During the night the snow had stopped, the wind had slackened. A wan sun shone, and he welcomed it as a sign. He was free now; he was alone and his boat was finished. He could leave this place, set out as soon as he had constructed his runway down to the water.

With his eyes half shut he dragged the two bodies to the cliff, hurled them unhesitatingly into the sea. That job was done. A grim smile came about his bearded lips. Now the real job. He took the tarpaulin from the shelter, rolling the anchoring boulders aside. One corner he held intact, transferring the fire there on flat stones. Here he placed what remained of the food, the spare clothing, the weapons and tools. Then he went about fashioning a long pry bar and a rude tackle, so that he might, in time, roll the long and heavy spars to the lowest edge of the cliff and there place the runway for his boat.

It took him weeks, but he did it, and at last, straining and sweating, shirts and sweaters discarded, overhauling manfully on his tackle, he got his boat up on to the head of the runway made of old spar ends.

Reaction set in immediately he hammered the wedges into place. He was tempted to fall down and sleep where he was, but, in a sort of gray, formless dream, he guided himself to his small shelter, replenished the tiny fire and slipped into sleep at once.

The yammer and harsh crying of sea birds awoke him. Thousands of molly hawks, dimming the weak sunlight, were circling the ledge; some had already landed. He lay still for a long time, gathering his faculties and his strength. Then he rose up, to kill until his arms were lame and could not lift any more.

He sang that night as he sat by his fire, burning the feathers from one bird and gnawing at it as he did so. Now he had food—enough to last him, should he eat sparingly, for a full three, four months. And in that time, he should either win, or lose. Tomorrow he would go. Tomorrow—

Half the night he sat up sewing sealskins into waterbags, filling them with dissolved snow, scooped up into them with his wooden dipper. When the last one was full he slept.

A red sun rose through gray cloud. Slowly the low banks of clouds fled, and only a thin veil of mist lay upon the dark green combers below the cliff. That was good; during the daylight hours he would have the sun to steer by. He loaded his waterskins, placing them within the rebuilt bow locker. He shipped his new seal bone thole pins in their midships holes, placed his long and heavy bladed sweeps fore and aft across the thwarts, saw that his spritsail sheet was free of binding turns about its cleat.

Then, straddling first one, afterward the other, he greased down with seal fat the jagged spars which made his runway. That was the last detail. Now he was completely ready. He came back to the top of the cliff, loaded in against the stern sheets his salted and smoked supply of bird meat.

He stood straight up, taking one look about this little ledge which had been his home. The molly hawks, forgetful of yesterday, had returned and taken over the place. One of them, he saw, had perched on the truck of the stubby signal mast they had rigged upright with a base of stones during that first week. Perhaps he should lower that to the ground before he went: in the improbable event that any ship might come into these waters, the dangerous passage of a boat's crew ashore would be in vain. He started for the pile of boulders upholding the mast butt.

A LOUD metallic wail came from the sea. He swung about, jaw slack, eyes blinking. He laughed, then shouted, cried. A small, bluff bowed and rusty ship lay stern-on to the swells some quarter of a mile offshore. The whistle wailed once more.

Stumbling, he crossed the patch of drifts to the signal mast, climbed up it. From its top, he waved madly, shouting until his overstrained throat muscles would not function. He slipped down carelessly to the stone base. The ship was coming closer, he could now see davits being outboarded and a boat swung clear.

Her bow anchors racketed down and she swung broadside to the big swells, rolling her low and rusty sides. On her bow he had made out the faint inscription: *Whangammu;* on her forecastlehead a harpoon gun and big line reels. She was an Australian whaler, then, probably out of Auckland or Adelaide, and all unconscious until a few minutes before of his or any man's presence here.

The big, red headed mate brought the long boat deftly in against the cliff; hands gripped hard about the haft of his steering sweep. The bow oar scrambled up on to a low outcrop of basalt with a painter; four of the boat's crew, the mate leading, came toiling up the cliff, one grumbling man remaining below to keep their craft off the rocks.

"So yer outa her, aye?" rumbled the red headed mate. "And the only bloke left alive? Aye—they been beating up an'

doon these lines for months; she's somewhere to the north'rd o' us noo. Come awa', lad; ye must 'a' had a bellyful o' this dour place. Aye?"

In his cracked voice and his few words of English, Hjalmar Bjornsen told them about his boat; how, just as he had heard their whistle blast, he was going to launch it. The red headed Scots mate studied the bearded, hawk faced boy beside him, then the boat. His men crowded curiously behind him. The officer turned to them.

"Th' laddie is cur'ous," he said. "He's workit for months on 't. He asks, would we send her clear for him. He's cur'ous, d' ye see, an' so am I. T'others wouldno' he'p him wi' it. 'Tis a' his ain work. Aye, clear awa'!"

Six pairs of hands jerked out the restraining wedges, shoved hard. At first the patched, lopsided boat slid slowly. But the cliff's fall was sharp and so, necessarily, was the crazy runway. Down it the boat bumped and slithered with tremendous speed. It slammed the grey surface of the sea keelside down. A grey comber got it, belabored it, flung it up, let it down. The boat pitched, very gradually settled, until only the gunwales were clear. Another comber hissed in. The boat went entirely from sight, air gurgling above it for a moment.

The Scots mate, the four Australian sailors, looked up with curious and sympathetic eyes at the man who had built the boat. To their surprise, Hjalmar Bjornsen was smiling gently. He had just realized that the boat had saved him, after all.

A MAN *of the* OPEN WORLD

By WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

HE GOT his name because of his skill in surgical operations with a pocket knife. I take pride in the fact that the name was bestowed by me.

"Doc", under other names, has fastened his fame to the traditions of many lands. Twice strangers spoke of him to me in Aden, Arabia. Once a man from Sonora told me legends of his early life there; and in Shanghai one of the directors of a great corporation was shocked and embarrassed to find him an acquaintance of Alaska gold rush days. Only a week ago I was talking with Rex Beach about one of the Doc's exploits in Siberia.

Doc was born in Charleston, and when still a child was transplanted in Sonora where he learned on longhorns how to ride horses. All his brothers were killed off. When a neighbor told him that the last brother had just been killed in a brawl with Mexicans, Doc went to the saloon for vengeance. As he entered the door, he too was shot. The lead slug knocked his legs from under him. The lights went out; and the boy—he was only eighteen years old at the time—dragged himself along the floor until he reached his brother's murderer, and killed him with his bare hands.

For awhile he ran cattle across the Border. This was in the days of General Lew Wallace, who was a friend of Doc's father; and the boy was warned. One night he was trapped. The Mexicans

were cooperating with General Wallace, and all roads east, south and west were cut off. Doc got a fresh horse from his father and rode north along the Rockies until he reached Canada. Afterward he joined the sealing fleet as a hunter, and turned up off the coast of Japan, sailing and hunting across the Pacific until the herds reached Alaska.

He was one of the early Americans in Alaska, and was a member of the Arctic Brotherhood, of which King Edward of England was an honorary member. In the company of a mad professor he made an unexploited dash for the North Pole across the ice fields which Steffanson crossed years later. He distinguished himself historically by locating the whaling fleet that had been trapped in the ice in the Arctic north of Bering Straits, near the shores of Wrangel Island, making the terrific dash over the ice alone.

Twice during the days of the gold rushes he made fortunes, and squandered them. One he lost within a week, gambling. The other he spent upon a lavish trip to Europe, in the course of which he met the King of England.

Upon his return he went north again, broke. He helped organize a group of adventurers devoted to the proposition that a raid might be made into Siberia to the gold fields there, and enough gold extracted before being discovered to make the invasion of this fairly powerful empire a fair risk. About sixty men actually undertook the raid. Doc knew of only two who returned. Alone, he managed to work his way down the coast to Korea where he was during part of the Russo-Japanese war.

Thence he went down to the Philippines where he served with the scouts and broke horses for the Government. When the Philippines had settled into calmness, he came up into China where the B.A.T. was undertaking a risky commercial campaign.

All China, with the comparatively unimportant exception of the tiny concessions in the handful of treaty ports, was severely barred by treaty to foreign trade. We began to open up the interior of China commercially, regardless of treaties or any other obstacles—and men of Doc's type were often assets.

Doc was a hard, powerful man; but good natured and tender hearted. We worked in perfect harmony, he acting the big brother in all worldly things and I the big brother when it came to books and business.

His legs were very short; but this shortness was compensated for by the length of his waist. He looked tall in the saddle. He was smooth shaven, with a rugged, wind reddened face and clear blue eyes. No one could frighten him; and he was a cold, clear headed fury when fighting mad.

One famous night in Tientsin the Japanese and American military forces were turned out to settle the riot that Doc had started in a house of *Geishas;* he turned up the next morning for breakfast, perfectly calm, unruffled and unidentified. He almost caused the death of both of us in Kalgan by starting to beat up some soldiers in a Chinese theater packed with half mutinous contingents on the verge of breaking. He planned once to intercept the caravan of tribute which the Dalai Lama sent customarily to the emperor at Peking, and which had started on its way when the emperor was deposed. Finally, he was so thoroughly infuriated by an attack some bandits made on me that he started off alone to attack them in their stronghold—the most cruel and ruthless bandits in the world, who laughed at walled cities and taunted viceroys from outside their closed gates! We stopped him only by ridicule.

He had no care for the future. His scheme of life was this: He had in bank enough money to provide for all his needs for a period of two years in case he should be incapaciated by sickness or accident for that length of time.

"If I'm no good after that, I'll croak," said Doc.

With old Doc gone it doesn't seem to me that the troubles in China can be very serious.

Here's a real Mystery Thriller

DRAWING ROOM B

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

MINTURN, lurking within Drawing Room B, heard the steps in the main Pullman aisle without and then a sharp rapping at his door. His expression was haggard, hopeless, helpless. He had gone over every possibility of escape.

Jump from the window, with the train pounding along at a mile a minute? Instant death! He might as well submit and be hanged for the murder of Norton.

Stand with his feet on the window sill and try clambering to the car roof from the outside? A human fly might do it, but Minturn knew he could not do it himself. Besides, they would look on the car roofs.

Fight his way out with a gun? How could he, with every vestibule locked, with the train crew warned, armed, and all this while scouring the train for him?

He was cornered. He was trapped like a rat. Here he stood, red handed, in Drawing Room B. And in the drawing room's tiny, private lavatory was the dead body of Gilbert Norton, propped upright, a knife still spiked in the breast.

And now came a rapping at the door.

"Who is it?" gasped Minturn. Such was his perturbation that his voice was not at all like his own. His thought was, "It's all over; I might as well give myself up."

"It's the conductor," came the response from without. "Don't worry, Mr. Norton. I'm not going to let that fellow get at you. Let me in, please. I want you to give me a better line on him."

A chance in a thousand! It flashed over Minturn, and he snatched at it as a drowning man snatches at a straw. This train conductor had never seen either Norton or Minturn. He obviously thought Norton was in here now, alone and alive. One slim chance in a thousand there was, and Minturn snatched at it frantically.

There was a garment, a silk smoking jacket with up and down yellow stripes, lying on the seat. Also there was a gray traveling cap. Both were undoubtedly Norton's. Minturn put them on. They in no manner effected a disguise. They merely made the wearer seem at ease and at home.

With his fingers trembling and as cold as ice, Minturn now unlocked the door. He opened it to the half arc. A burly, uniformed conductor stepped in. Had it been the Pullman conductor instead of the train conductor, Minturn's false position would have been exposed instantly. For the Pullman conductor knew by sight both Gilbert Norton and Gilbert Norton's wife, had taken stewardship of their tickets two divisions point back, had in fact acted as a buffer between the Nortons, honeymooners, and the intrusions of successive train conductors.

The train conductor having now stepped inside of Drawing Room B, Minturn hastily relocked the door. He was still haggard, frightened, trembling.

But it was in exactly such a state that the conductor would have found Gilbert Norton, had he not arrived ten minutes too late. The conductor expected to find one live man in this drawing room, lounging in a smoking jacket, and such a man he found. It was the most natural error in the world for him to classify Minturn as Norton.

The conductor, mopping the sweat from his broad, florid brow, sat down. Minturn seated himself opposite. This, be it understood, was a standard drawing room; that is, there was a narrow aisle, on the window side of which there was a standard Pullman section. Across the aisle was a plush covered bench. In a corner there was a narrow, interior door, giving to the private lavatory, an annex about three feet square which now concealed the upright body of Gilbert Norton.

"I'm Conductor Jim Bromley," began the conductor. His manner was deferential, as any skipper's is likely to be when intruding upon the private quarters of a *de luxe* passenger. "Your wife found me in the diner, Mr. Norton," went on Bromley, "where I was taking a bite of supper with the Pullman conductor. She told me there's a man on the train gunning for you, and I've taken steps to see that he don't get in here. I got my brakeman, Bill Dukes, on guard. Bill's hard boiled and he's heeled with a gun. I got him sitting with your wife in a section about the middle of this Pullman. If the man she's afraid of comes in, she's to pinch Bill's arm. We can then trust Bill to do his stuff. How does that strategy of defense strike you, Mr. Norton?"

Minturn bit down hard on his bloodless underlip. He was thinking under the whip of frantic desperation. He knew that his only chance of maintaining the illusion was to prevent Norton's wife from coming in. If she did she'd cry out, "Why, this is not my husband!" and the conductor would then punch him, Minturn, a quick, through ticket for the scaffold.

Therefore Minturn chose not to minimize the peril of attack by a passenger known and feared by the bride of the late Gilbert Norton, unknown and mysterious to Conductor Bromley, and who was really Minturn himself. Rather he chose to applaud without stint the precautions taken by the train crew.

"If that fellow gets anywhere close to me he'll start shooting," said Minturn tensely, nor did he need to fake his utter funk. "If he starts shooting, I don't want my wife jammed in here with me in close quarters. He has nothing against

her. He never saw her before today. She's safe, except for getting in the way of a stray bullet. Please don't let her come in here, Conductor, until you've got that man in custody."

"I won't," assured Bromley forcefully. "Now I don't want to horn in on your private business, Mr. Norton, but at the same time I want as good a lowdown as I can get on this whole affair. On a minor count, that fellow's beating a ride on my train. He's offered no ticket, nor announced himself to any trainman. He's a stowaway, hiding somewhere on this train. Hanged if I can understand it, either. I've just been through all the eleven coaches, with your wife in tow to identify him, and he can't be found."

"Maybe," suggested Minturn hoarsely, "he jumped off the train."

"If he did he broke his neck. He got on at Macksville, and we've hit fifty mile an hour ever since."

"It's a wonder," again suggested Minturn, "that you don't begin to doubt that he really boarded the train."

Minturn's choice of words was, perforce, strainedly cautious. Every time he used the pronoun "*he*" he had to think the pronoun "*I*." His heart was pounding like a trip hammer. It was a ponderous tragedy of farce, this act wherein Bromley thought he was talking to Norton, thought he was safeguarding Norton, whereas actually Norton stood propped upright, hideously dead, in a closet of this same compartment.

"Frankly, I did doubt it," admitted Bromley, "after the first futile search through the train. Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley still doubts it; he's lost interest in the search and is back in one of his other Pullmans. Seeley points out that your wife is nervously excited and merely imagines that a menace exists. Seeley saw all that rice throwing back at Columbus, Mr. Norton, and knows that you were only married this morning. He claims that the little lady is upset and having a brainstorm. But I myself, after sifting the evidence, known darn' well it's not a brainstorm; I'm convinced that there really is a stowaway aboard, stalking you, seeking your life."

"There is, for a fact," agreed Minturn, his dominant motive now being to prevent Norton's bride from reappearing in Drawing Room B.

"To clear our minds," went on Bromley, "let's rehash the account brought to me by your wife. It's now 7:00 P.M. An hour ago the train stopped at Macksville, changing engines and crews. That's where I got on myself. You and your wife were seated here, looking from your windows at the platform crowd. Your wife felt your hand grip hers tensely; she saw you turn pale; you were staring at a man on the platform; you were, she is sure, badly frightened. She followed your eyes and saw their objective, a man out there staring back at you, hatefully she says, striding toward your window as though for purpose of assault."

"That's right," confirmed Minturn. "I was scared. When I saw him coming, I slammed my window shut."

"Your wife," went on Bromley, "asked you about it, but you were reticent. At that same instant the train began to roll slowly out of the station. Your wife leaned from her own window and looked back. She was just in time to see the man leap to the brass railing of the observation platform, as it would have passed him, and climb aboard. He had no traveling bag; therefore his boarding must have been spurred by a sudden impulse. Your wife describes him as clean shaven, about your own age, Mr. Norton, and says that he wore a straw hat and carried a cane. Do you check that?"

"Ye-es," agreed Minturn carefully. "But remember that I myself did not see him hop the back end of the train. I'd slammed my own window shut. It was my wife who leaned from hers and saw him board us."

"Now here's what seems to have happened," went on Bromley. "As we were pulling out of Macksville, they were serving supper in the diner. The diner is the first coach ahead of the observation. The observation itself is a half Pullman,

half parlor. The rear or parlor end was deserted then, its recent occupants having gone forward to supper. Thus it is probable that no one saw our man make his informal entry from the rear. But in that parlor we now find a straw hat and cane which no one will claim."

Minturn nodded. He knew quite well that he had left his hat and cane in the deserted parlor car.

"THEN," resumed Conductor Bromley, tapping five fingers against five thoughtfully, "this fellow came on forward through the train. Hatless and without bag, he did not appear like a passenger who had just boarded. He was looking for you, Mr. Norton. He didn't know which Pullman you were on. As yet he had no plan of attack.

"Coming forward, he arrives at the rear entrance of the diner. Tables for four were on the right of an aisle, and tables for two were on the left. Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley was seated at the next to the rear table for two. You understand, Mr. Norton, that I'm piecing out this theory mainly from information brought me by your wife."

"I understand," acknowledged Minturn.

"Seeley's back," went on Bromley, "was to the rear of the diner. The two chair table just behind him was vacant. Our man seated himself at that table, back to back with Seeley. Possibly he did so to avoid passing Seeley in the aisle and being accosted for a ticket. Or possibly he merely wanted time to think out his program of attack. Anyway he sat down. A waiter came and took his order. In the meantime you and your wife were here in Drawing Room B, two Pullmans ahead of the diner. You were frightened, and your fright increased when your wife told you she'd seen the man hop the rear end."

"Naturally she thinks I'm a chump and a coward," murmured Minturn, his chin drooped ashamedly, never for an instant forsaking the character of Norton.

"She admits she was piqued because you wouldn't confide in her," went on Bromley. "Just then you both heard a voice in the main aisle, calling, 'Supper now being served in the dining car'. You, Mr. Norton, should normally have been hungry. Mrs. Norton says that neither of you had eaten since the wedding breakfast at nine this morning. Imagine her surprise, then, when you said you didn't feel like eating and urged her to go alone back to the diner!"

These details were all new to Minturn. He absorbed them carefully, however, for the benefit of his part. He could understand what a chump Norton must have appeared to his wife. Norton, a bridegroom, declining to eat the first supper of married life with his bride! No wonder she was piqued.

"She knew," went on Bromley, "that it was because you were afraid of the man who had boarded the train. It put you, if you'll pardon me, in a poor light. She took you at your word and went back alone to the diner. As soon as she was out, she heard the click of the latch as you locked yourself in, here in Drawing Room B."

"I expected that fellow to come in any minute and start shooting," asserted Minturn.

"Your wife," resumed Bromley, "reached the diner, where the steward ushered her to the only vacant seat, if we neglect the seat opposite Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley. She found herself at a table opposite the mysterious passenger. An ironic situation, wasn't it, Mr. Norton?"

Minturn bit down hard on his under lip and then admitted that it was.

"She was startled," went on Bromley, "but she had no fair motive to make an outcry. All she knew of this fellow was that a glimpse of him had terrified you, her husband. The man, in his turn, must have recognized her as the woman he had seen beside you at adjacent windows.

"What happened? Nothing, except that these ill mated diners received their orders and ate in silence, furtively appraising each other.

"About that time I entered the diner from in front. I'd made the day coaches and was looking for the Pullman conductor. I saw him eating supper, and came up, greeting him, asking, 'Did you take on any Pullman passengers at Macksville, Joe?'

"He said, 'Not a one, Jim.' That simplified my immediate duties, as this train only stops at division points. There couldn't possibly be any sleeping car passenger whose ticket hadn't been punched by my predecessor. Joe Seeley's steak looked good, and I was hungry, so I sat down opposite him."

"Why," exclaimed Minturn, "then you must have seen this fellow you're looking for, eating at the next table with Mrs. Norton."

"I was vaguely aware of a well dressed couple there," admitted Bromley rather sheepishly, "but the man's back was to me. I merely assumed that they were man and wife. Besides, I was busy. While waiting for my steak, Seeley and I went through our customary ritual of teamwork. He showed me certain railroad tickets in his custody, of cross-continent passengers, giving me berth and drawing room numbers. These tickets included your own, Mr. Norton. But for this mixup, I probably wouldn't have seen you during my entire run."

"I understand," said Minturn.

And he did understand this part of it, for while seated in the diner, he had turned his head and observed the two conductors sorting through envelops at the table back of him.

"Your wife," went on Bromley, "finished her supper hurriedly and came forward to rejoin you here in Drawing Room B. By then she was probably a little ashamed of her pique. On the way here, she looked back and saw that her recent table companion was following her. Alarmed, she increased her pace. She fairly ran the rest of the way here. She knocked frantically on this door. You, Mr. Norton, hearing her voice calling you, opened the door and admitted her."

"Yes," agreed Minturn, hastily taking up the account so that he might seem properly cognizant of it, "and I just barely got her in in time to slam the door in the face of that man. We both saw him come racing around the corner of the bend aisle. I got the door locked, though, just in time. He banged on it, calling through to me, 'Let me in, Norton! I've been five years hunting you down; let me in.'

" 'Who is he?' my wife asked me. 'Never mind who he is,' I told her, 'but if he gets in here he'll start shooting; that's what he'll do, he'll start shooting.'

"Quick as a flash, my wife pressed a bell button, ringing for the porter. That must have scared the man away, for when the porter arrived there was no one around."

Minturn paused; he could not recount any more of the dialog between the Nortons because that was all he knew. He had naturally retreated at the ringing of the bell. Fortunately, Conductor Bromley took up the account as he had gotten it from Mrs. Norton.

"Your wife," he stated, "insisted on reporting to the conductor. You were afraid to desert the refuge of this drawing room, so she offered to find me herself. She, in fact, knew I was eating supper in the diner. She left you and heard you lock the door after her. Coming back to the diner, she made a full report to Seeley and myself. We summoned the steward, as well as the waiter who had served supper to your wife. Both of these recalled the man who had eaten opposite her, mainly because he had left the table without calling for his check, leaving a bill on his plate. Their descriptions of him were, as descriptions usually are, bafflingly general. They both said, however, that they would know the man if they saw him again. That gave me three identifiers, your wife, the steward and the waiter. Seeley and I led them from end to end of the train, scanning the face of each passenger. All three gave each passenger a clean bill. Where does that leave me, Mr. Norton?"

"It leaves you up in the air, like I am," answered Minturn.

"It sure does. Why, we've poked into every nook on the train. Bill Dukes, my brakeman, has even stood on the back railing and looked down the roofs. It's hardly a wonder that Pullman Conductor Joe Seeley has given up in disgust, thinking it a hoax or a dream. What prevents me from agreeing with Seeley is this: the steward and the waiter admit that a man ate supper opposite your wife; yet they can't identify this man among all the exposed passengers of the train. There's only one conclusion; that man is on the train, *unexposed*."

BROMLEY puckered his broad, reddish brow and frowned out of the window into the deepening dusk. Then, jerkily, he switched on one of the lights, dissolving the gloom in Drawing Room B. It was not the main, or ceiling light, but the small berth light between the windows. Minturn shrank as far back from its glow as he could.

"Mr. Norton," said Bromley, "while your wife was back in the diner reporting to me, that fellow didn't knock on your door again, did he?"

"No," answered Minturn quickly.

A falsehood, of course, for here was Minturn now. Actually Minturn's intrusion had been absurdly simple. He had merely knocked; upon Norton's timid inquiry as to who knocked, Minturn had replied in a disguised voice, "The train conductor." And Norton, who knew the conductor had been sent for, had unlocked the door.

"Now, Mr. Norton," pursued Bromley, "can't you give me some definite detail of description which will help me run this man down?"

Minturn, put to the delicate task of describing himself, considered his reply cautiously. He decided to keep to the generalities of the wife's description, yet at the same time strew a few herrings of confusion across the trail. He answered:

"I haven't seen this man, until today, for five years. He was then known as Henry Lord, but he may have changed his name a dozen times since. He's a blackmailer and something of a nut. Clean shaven, rather full in the face, blue-gray eyes and about my age. Medium height. Five years ago he had a mole on his chin. I'm sure of that. Yes, and he had one gold tooth, in the upper row. I'm sure of that, too."

"Fine," exulted Bromley, rising to his feet. "With that dope, I'll get him. Unless, him being something of a nut, he's been fool enough to jump off the train. If so he's back along the right of way with a broken neck. Sit tight, Mr. Norton. Dead or alive, his game's up. No crook can stow away on Jim Bromley's train."

"And in the meantime, you'll keep my wife out there safely under the protection of the brakeman?" pleaded Minturn, as he arose to unlock the door for Bromley.

"We will, not only for her protection but for her ability to identify the man if he shows up in the outer aisle." With that promise Bromley left the drawing room, whose door Minturn relocked with feverish haste.

Minturn was a rag of sweat. The long ordeal with Bromley had dragged him through a sieve of torturing suspense.

And to what end? What had he gained? Nothing but a miserable dole of time, a slightly extended respite in which to attempt the planning of an impossible escape.

The train was speeding inexorably on, at a speed of fifty miles an hour. It swung to the left on a sharp curve and Minturn, still standing with his hand on the latch, was thrown slightly forward against the narrow door of the lavatory.

He could have screamed then; for it seemed that the corpse of Norton was leaping out on him. Ghostly, glass eyed, clad in cap and striped jacket, Norton seemed to leap upon him like a vengeful ghoul. Minturn could have screamed, probably would have if he had not realized in time that the lavatory door was a full length mirror door; it had been his own ghastly reflection leaping forward with the lurch of the train.

He went to the windows. It was pitch dark now. It was going on eight o'clock. Two hours to Graybull and the next stop.

Minturn knew that he could not possibly keep up the illusion that long. Bromley would quickly research the train; within a short time he would definitely establish that no passenger with a chin mole or a gold tooth was aboard. Little by little the conductor's brain would clear and the hoax would out.

Or, as the tension laxed, Gilbert Norton's wife would insist finally upon returning to her husband. Or the Pullman conductor would show up. Or the porter. Any of these eventualities would expose and doom Minturn.

He would be lucky, he realized, if he even had five minutes more to benefit by this skulking masquerade. His rope was short and getting shorter. He was in desperate strait, a strait from which he must miraculously escape or else hang for the murder of Gilbert Norton.

It was the infernal speed of the train which defeated flight by the window. If he could only halt the train—

That was it! If he could only connive some ruse of magic which would bring this mighty comet of rattling steel to a full and sudden stop. They were in a wooded wilderness, Minturn knew, and the night was dark. It would not be dangerous to drop from the window if the train were motionless. Minturn might be a long way off in the woods before bloodhounds were started on his trail.

The man's excited brain concentrated frantically upon this vital issue—this single forlorn avenue of escape—stopping the train.

The solution, an amazing inspiration, burst suddenly like a bomb within his brain. It shocked him to the verge of stupefaction. He swayed there in the narrow aisle of Drawing Room B, feet wide apart to keep his dizzy balance as the train pounded on, as the rails clicked on in rhythm with his own racing heart.

But he saw the way. The sweat of his body fairly froze; he was chilled; he was dazed; but he saw the way, the ruse of magic by which he could stop this train in a hundred seconds of time.

He could not pull the emergency bell cord, for there was no such cord in the drawing room. There would be one, however, in the main aisle without. And Train Conductor Bromley could and would pull it, if—

If what? What, Minturn asked himself, are the circumstances of emergency under which a conductor will signal for the quickest possible stop? When and why will a captain stop the fastest ocean liner in mid-sea? Man overboard! There was the answer. Minturn would create the illusion of a man overboard, of a fugitive jumping out the window of a speeding train. To the fate of a broken neck, surely; nevertheless, by all human laws the skipper must stop the train. Train or ship, an effort must be made to recover that body and carry it on to port.

One hundred seconds of time it would take; while the air brakes screeched and the train slackened from fifty to zero miles an hour. The greatest hazard of the interval would be, Minturn knew, the wife of Gilbert Norton. Five words from her—"Why, this is not my husband!"—and all would be lost. But would she utter them in these hundred seconds of time?

Would she not more likely collapse in a faint at sight of a man, gory, knifed, wearing gray cap and silk smoking jacket of yellow stripes stretched apparently dead or dying on the floor of Drawing Room B? Or, if she did not faint, would not she be too hysterical to render potent testimony during those vital two minutes? Better still, would not the burly forms of conductor and brakeman bar her immediate ingress to the drawing room?

Forlorn or feasible, Minturn seized it as his only straw of salvation.

He set to work. He opened a window to its widest width. There was no screen; had there been, Minturn would have punched it out. He then looked to the lighting. It suited him; the ceiling bulb

was not lighted; the berth light was. The effect was a dim illumination, lighting the window area better than that of the floor.

Minturn now opened the door of the tiny lavatory. The body of Gilbert Norton toppled out into his arms. The knife was still spiked in Norton's breast. Minturn withdrew it. The withdrawal, as well as the jostling of the body, caused the blood to flow afresh.

This blood of Gilbert Norton smeared the silk and striped jacket worn by Minturn. Minturn wanted it thus smeared. His hands became sticky, red; he brushed them across the features of his own pallid face. Never did glutted fiend or monster appear more guilt stained than did Minturn now.

He dragged the corpse to the open window. He shoved the head and arms through the opening, then paused to calculate the balance. The vital issue was that the conductor must seem to see with his own eyes the murderer dive head first from the window.

And so with ghoulish nicety Minturn balanced the corpse over the window sill by the hips. An inch more and it would have toppled out. The train was pounding on with terrific speed. Any lurch on to a curve to the left might lend a centrifugal pull which would spill the body out into the night.

Minturn, taking no chances of prematurely losing this dummy in death which was to impersonate his own flight, kept hold with his right hand to one of Norton's ankles. By stretching, Minturn could then reach forward with his left hand to the knob of his door.

Softly he turned the latch, unlocking the door. That he must do; for there should be, of course, no resistance to the inrush of conductor and brakeman. How that door got unlocked, and how Minturn had ever gotten in, would be puzzles too intricate to be solved within the harried calculations of a hundred seconds of time.

Now, still holding to the ankle of the precariously balanced corpse, Minturn lay down in the aisle on his back. He laid the bloody knife across his own bloody chest. He threw the stained sleeve of his left arm across his own face. He made ready to hold his breath. For a hundred seconds of time death must seem to be life, and life death. The body of Norton must seem to be Minturn, and Minturn must seem to be the body of Norton.

THE train lurched to the left. Minturn opened his lips and gave full cry:

"Help! Murder!"

He heard the bustling approach down the main aisle of the Pullman. Just as the door knob turned, Minturn released his hold from the ankle of the corpse, giving it a slight shove as he did so. And just as the florid face of Train Conductor James Bromley appeared in the open doorway, the body of Norton slid and slithered, legs last, into the night.

"Goshamighty!" bawled Bromley.

Shocked almost out of his boots, he still retained sufficient wit to reach up and jerk the emergency cord which signaled for the stopping of the train.

"I seen him," bawled Brakeman Bill Dukes, who was pressing close behind Bromley. "I seen him jump out o' the window."

"Oh, Gilbert!" shrieked Mrs. Gilbert Norton, bride of ten hours, who, pressing close and looking over the shoulders of the two trainmen, caught a glimpse of the victim who lay sprawled in the narrow aislet of Drawing Room B.

She did not faint. But she went into hysterics and stood there wringing her hands.

Hardly in any case could she have squeezed by at the instant. because Bromley filled the portal and bawled—

"Stand back, every one."

A negro porter and three passengers were now adding to the congestion. All this while the air brakes were grinding, and the train was rapidly slowing to a halt.

"Bill," bellowed Bromley, "when we stop, signal the hoghead to back up half a mile. Get a detail of porters and

pick up that nut murderer. You'll find him with a broken neck. Load him on the baggage car, Bill."

Bill withdrew. Bromley then came soberly forward and kneeled beside the prone figure in the drawing room aisle.

"Mr. Norton, are you—did he—?" Bromley flinched, sickened by the sticky feel of the victim's chest, as Bromley groped for the heart.

He flinched again as his wrist touched a knife, and as this knife slid off the body to the floor.

Minturn held himself rigid, breath drawn, his eyes covered with the upflung arm. All the while those precious seconds of time were expending swiftly; the train was rocking to a halt.

"Thank God you're alive!" breathed Bromley huskily, just as Minturn could hold his breath no longer, and just as the train came to a full stop, its steel frame shivering mightily.

"He's still alive!"

Bromley turned to convey this gladsome message to the woman, who stood in the doorway sobbing and wringing her hands.

It was Minturn's chance. As Bromley turned from him, Minturn leaped to his feet.

He took Bromley completely by surprise. Hardly could Bromley have anticipated such a magic revival by a man just stabbed with a knife. He was too utterly dumbfounded to move a muscle, far too wit bound and muscle bound to reach forward and restrain Minturn.

While he gaped, Minturn dived head first from the window of Drawing Room B.

He lit, on wrists and knees, upon a sandy embankment, breaking a wrist bone, bruising his knees and sliding face downward into a borrow pit of shallow water. The night was inky dark. Came three blasts from the engine and the train began to back.

What now? Should he dash into the woods beyond the borrow pit, limping away in hopeless flight, to be pursued by bloodhounds just as soon as the trainmen could alarm a sheriff at the next town?

Minturn chose no such course of folly. He had fooled them twice; he would fool them again. Let them wonder why he left no tracks of exit from the right of way. Let the bloodhounds sniff what spoor they would. He, Minturn, would do the one thing they would never expect him to do—he would ride away *on this same train.*

Scrambling to his feet, he climbed up the embankment in the path of his own sliding descent. The train was backing slowly. Minturn stooped beneath a coach, crawled upon the rods and lay there like an accomplished vagabond, while the train rolled on backward over the ties.

There was a creaking stop in half a mile. Voices. Lanterns. The brakeman's cry:

"Here he is, boss! Stone dead—stabbed—crushed! A helluva mess, boss!"

There was the business of identifying that body as Norton's. There was the further business of loading it on the baggage coach.

Then the train moved forward, slowly, slowly. In half a mile it stopped again.

More voices along the side of the train. Trainmen shouting to one another. Lanterns flickering. Minturn lay there quietly, on the rods, catching every sound.

"Make a note of the mile post, Bill," he heard Bromley yell.

"Got it," bawled Bill. "That geezer took to the woods in a hurry; you can betcher life he did. I got the mileage from this here culvert, boss. It's four eighty-two point six."

"Raytown's only six miles on," bellowed Bromley. "We'll stop and report, and they'll have a posse here in an hour. Dogs, too. That guy ain't got a chance. All aboard!"

Toot-toot! The train moved on.

IT WAS a week later that Minturn, at a Detroit hotel, was reading the latest news edition covering the sensation which had become advertised as the "Mystery in Drawing Room B." Through this

last week, in his flight, he had kept accurately abreast of the hue and cry.

He felt reasonably safe. What worried him most was the distress of the bereaved young woman, the woman who had faced him across that small table in the dining car. He recalled the freshness of her, the innocence and the refinement of her features. He found himself strongly, though not strangely, drawn to her in a bond of sympathy.

These news accounts told more of her, not omitting the address of the parents with whom she had sought refuge in her grief. Minturn was sure that he owed her a certain comfort which was in his power to bestow. He therefore wrote and posted to her an anonymous letter, which read:

> Do not grieve for Gilbert Norton. You are not his widow; you were never his wife.
>
> He married my own sister five years ago and, after gaining control of her considerable fortune, he absconded with it on the very day her child was born.
>
> I was vindictive. No court or jury would ever believe that I did not kill Gilbert Norton. Found as I was in there with his body, known as I was to be stalking him, no silver tongue of defensive eloquence could ever persuade my innocence.
>
> Thus I shall never present my defense to any jury except yourself. You alone may believe me. for you alone saw the crimson, craven shame on Norton's face when I appeared on the station platform. Hark back to the testimony of his own guilty eyes, and then, dear lady, hear my own testimony of defense.
>
> It is this: confronting Norton in Drawing Room B, I merely said. "So you've added bigamy to your other crimes, Norton!" Cornered like that, even a jackal will slash and bite—and thus did Norton. He came at me with a knife. I caught his wrist. We struggled. The train lurched into a sharp curve, dislodging his stance, hurling him against the wall—and against the point of his own knife.
>
> That is the truth, so help me God! I have testified. And now your verdict? Guilty or not guilty? This hotel stationery and this postmark, Detroit, are clues. If you do not believe me, by all means turn this communication over to the police.

Minturn took no chances. Immediately on posting the letter he entrained for Denver. He watched the accounts closely, however, for many weeks, and as far as he could tell there was never any inquiry made for him in the city of Detroit.

VALHALLA

I WAS racing with night, hedge hopping;
Rain storm and wind at my tail:
Put in—because dark had caught me?
Hell, I was flying the mail!

The ceiling was down on the treetops,
Almost; but I'd beaten the game
Too often before to crawfish;
Then—the crash came!

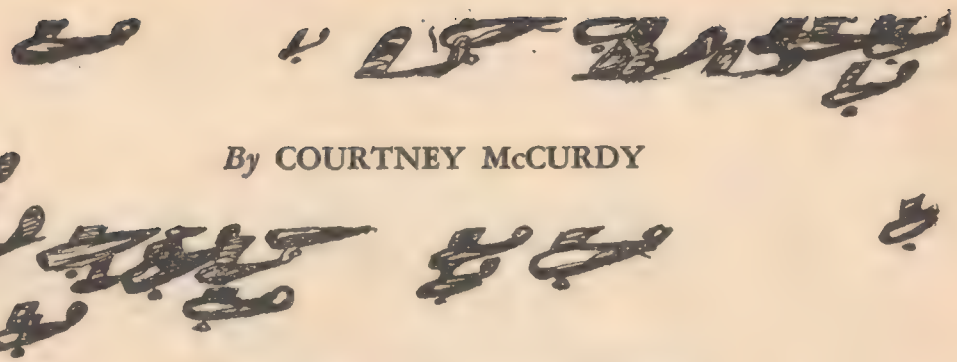
It was hell for one long red instant;
And then I broke through . . .
The murk had all vanished
And the sky was blue!

Then, *I saw them*—coming like comets
With fire flecked manes:
What told me that was my squadron
Of battle planes?

I waggled my wings; they answered,
And checked their pace;
Third in line from the V's point
I took my old place.

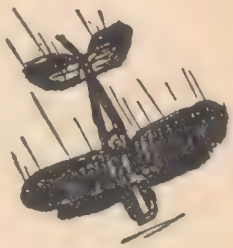
One waved. Gods of glory! Who was it?
Rockwell? *I'd seen him fall!*
But—Prince, too, so help me! And Chapman!
Lufberry! Why here were they all.

And others I'd never flown with—
Guynemer and Navarre!
Dead men—but, no time for wonder!
Out from behind a star



By COURTNEY McCURDY

Charged a red winged covey of Fokkers—
(And well I knew *those!*)
Immelman, Boelke, their staffels,
And—Richthofen, the prince of foes!



We met them, and gods, what a meeting!
What a dogfight we staged—
Like berserkers battle crazy,
We ramped and we raged!

We parried and thrust like fencers,
Foreseeing each trick:
My plane became part of my being,
Needing no stick.

Zoom, dip, loop and dive—full power!
Sideslip and spin;
And then—like that—it was over
And we all headed in.

God knows where we landed. Some planet.
What odds? It was Mars, perhaps;
But we messed, foe and friend, all together,
And found each other good chaps.

Houris served us there at the table:
There were magnums of brew
That tasted like champagne and starshine
Well blent . . . Then, the next that I knew,

Here I lay, a pitiful cripple
Stretched out on your hospital rack;
Yes, Doctor, I'd won to Valhalla;
But, damn you, you dragged me back!

Continuing

BELOW ZERO

A Turbulent Novel of the Great North Woods

By HAROLD TITUS

YOUNG, impetuous John Steele Belknap made himself into as good a logger as could be found in the woods against the day when he would go up to take charge of Kampfest, the ideal logging camp he and old Tom Belknap, his father, had planned for years. But when young John presented himself for the job, his father almost broke his heart by telling him he wasn't ready. Old Tom didn't want his boy to go to Kampfest yet—until he had cleaned up the mess he had made by appointing one Paul Gorbel the temporary boss, over young John's protests. Tom Belknap was proud of his reputation as a picker of men.

John pulled stakes and went to Shoestring, where the Richards Lumber Company was struggling along under Ellen Richards, who was too young and too pretty for such work. When John, under the name of Steele, heard of the unscrupulous means the Belknap & Gorbel outfit were taking to close out Ellen Richards, he suspected Paul Gorbel; and to prove his suspicion he applied for the job—and got it—as superintendent of the Richards outfit.

Then began a tough uphill battle to put the Richards Company on its feet and clear his father's good name. One by one John Belknap whipped up the men's spirit until it was like his own; and his personality and strength began to show results. Ellen Richards began to smile again . . .

Then two things happened which nearly wrote the Richards Lumber Company out of existence. First, the little train that kept the mill in logs was mysteriously wrecked, holding up the sawyers many hours. Then the horse barn was burned. In both cases John felt that Paul Gorbel was behind the mishaps. But in the second he had more than mere suspicion to go on. In the burning barn he found the body of a stranger, and by his side was a gallon jug that had contained gasoline. John called in the sheriff and told him of his find; and the sheriff went over to the Belknap & Gorbel job to see if they knew the man. His report was short and to the point:

"Your friend there—" he jerked his thumb toward the figure beneath the blanket— "went to work for Burke at the B. & G. camp last Monday!"

SOUNDS of saw and hammer filled the air. Men moved methodically from place to place. On the ashes of yesterday's barn a new, rough structure grew. Men were smeared with soot and ashes; many doing work to which they were not accustomed, but they worked. They worked! And Ellen Richards, as she stood on a stump and watched the framework grow, watched the roof go on, watched sheeting slapped into place and held and nailed home, smiled with misted eyes. Who would not, seeing men work that way; and seeing one of them move about, quiet, assured, competent, directing it all for you.

John talked to her at intervals throughout the forenoon and, somehow, he had difficulty saying the things he wanted to say. Other things kept coming to his lips, personal, gentle things. And deep in his heart, hour after hour, lay that new trouble, that growing conviction that in such a warfare as this a man like old Tom Belknap, hard as he was, unjust as he had been to his own son, could have no hand.

Wolf Richards had recovered from his shock of last night. To himself he assigned the task of helping Jack Tait sort out the tangle of harness and as he worked he talked—rather sparingly at first but, by the time the cook appeared

in the doorway of his shanty and yelled for the men to come get it, Wolf was going his best.

No silence at that meal. Not with Wolf Richards shrilling from the end of the table.

"That's way to build things!" he croaked. "Build 'em now. Don't talk about 'em. When I builded me my fur room, didn't do nothin' else. Nothin' else but that an' in five weeks I had her done!"

Men chuckled and looked at one another and laughed aloud.

"Laugh, tarn ye!" he shrilled. "Didn't have fifty men t' do this an' that. Had one man, two hands, fifteen hours o' daylight. An' Ellen, so long's you got a hand that'll step spry, you don't worry. Not much! Don't worry. Not ary!

"My, but them's elegant corn fritters! My, my, what a cook this is!"

The barn would be habitable for the teams that night; a few hours of work by a dozen men tomorrow would complete it; a track problem at the crossing had become pressing, and John welcomed the chance to ride that far with Ellen. He would return on a speeder.

There was little chance for them to talk, with the train crew, the sheriff, a man going out from the B. & G. camp, and the grim burden in the far end of the way car. But they were near one another and that was a lot.

They were at the crossing a time while Tiny tinkered and John watched Ellen viewing the long strings of loads, taxing the storage capacities of trackage, waiting to be moved into Kampfest. He saw her look at the short little train of logs they had dragged up the grade and her shoulders slacked significantly.

"A feast for them," she commented, "and for us—famine."

The look in her eyes wrenched his heart.

Her hand closed on his tightly and then she was gone. John stood for a time, watching the train rock on toward Shoestring, steam shut off as they slid down the stiff grades that led into town.

Feast or a famine! Not his father's doing, this; Gorbel's probably; but the situation was real and acute and he could not recover from the look on the girl's face. The hold her property had on life was by but a finger.

He looked about at the long strings of loaded cars, waiting removal to the Belknap & Gorbel mill. Not since the blizzard had the branch cleaned itself out. Only enough cars were moved to make room for more coming in from the B. & G. camps.

Even a switch, heretofore used only by the Richards empties, had been commandeered. He counted the cars standing there. Twenty-one; seven thousand feet to a load—enough for a four-day cut, if they belonged to Ellen now. The car wheels were blocked because the switch ran into the Shoestring line on the downgrade. He eyed one of those charred chunks which supplemented the hold of hand set brakes as though he had never seen such a device used before. Then he went on, whistling tunelessly to himself. He laughed after a moment and said aloud—

"Fire—fire's best fought with fire!"

He talked with the crossing tender of the track difficulties, outlined temporary repairs. The man asked for the next night off apologetically; his wife wanted an evening of movies; John told him to plan on it, a bit more heartily than even he was wont to grant favors to men. John had a plan.

He had noticed that the B. & G. man, who had ridden in the caboose, was hanging about the crossing. He walked with a pronounced limp and as John and the tender started for the little house where the gas car was stored he approached.

"Jim, ain't they making a run from Kampfest this evening?" he asked.

"No; had trouble in the yards," the tender said.

"My hard luck, then," the man said. "I'd ought to've telephoned and found out." He looked at John. "Is there any chance getting back to camp tonight?"

"Ride in on the speeder with me, if you want."

That was agreeable to the stranger.

A mile out of the crossing, as they rolled through the twilight toward timber on the horizon, his passenger put a hand on John's shoulder and asked:

"Would you shut her off a minute? I got something to talk about."

That roused curiosity; he threw off the switch; the motor went dead and they rolled to a stop, there in the solitude of snow blanketed choppings.

"Mr. Steele," the man said, "the sheriff told me about your fire. I heard him talking to the train crew about it and how he thinks that the man they're taking to Shoestring wandered into your barn while he was drunk and set the place off trying to smoke."

He paused.

"I try to be a decent citizen. I try to be loyal to the man that hires and pays me. But I like horses—I like 'em better than I like humans, my wife says. I used to be a barn boss for Kampfest but I got this stiff leg and can't get around so much. I'm filing for Gorbel in camp, now. I don't like to bite the hand that feeds me but—I'm decent!"

There was something dogged about the man.

"What I've got to say is that a man who'll burn horses alive don't deserve loyalty; he don't deserve anything but the worst he can get! That's why I'm going to tell you what I know.

"That man under the blanket in your way car worked in our camp for three days. He was no good. He just made motions instead of working. But yesterday afternoon Gorbel came to camp. He and this man stood outside the window of my shop a long time. I went out and then went back to get something. It takes me a long time to walk a little ways. I didn't aim to spy, but when I got back there, Mr. Steele, these two men were over by the gasoline tank, which sets off by itself, drawing off gasoline."

John's heart leaped.

"They drew a jug of it. The man went out and walked down the track; Gorbel went in and ate and drove back to Kampfest that night. We haven't seen the man since."

He ended with a grim nod.

"We found a broken jug in the ruins," John said. "A plain glass, gallon jug."

"That's what they had," the other said.

John swore softly.

"We knew it was set," he said after eyeing the man's face and deciding that it was wholly good and without guile. "We're keeping still; we're going to try to run this thing down without any fuss. Now, if you'll tell the sheriff what you've told me, his job would be easy."

The other hesitated, then twisted his head in a nod of assent.

"I will," he promised. "I don't like to get any man into trouble but—it's the horses, you see."

"I understand. Nobody likes to squawk, but in a case like this it's almost a man's duty."

"That's what I figure, too. I—I'd made up my mind to quit working for Gorbel tonight but maybe it'll be better if I stay on, even if I hate to take money from a man like that."

"You stay on," John said. "I'll pass your story along to Bradshaw and he'll see you sometime when it won't give his hand away."

"I'll help all I can, even to stickin' on for B. & G. My name's Young. When you want me, send word."

CHAPTER X

THE OTHER MAN'S GAME

AGAIN something new for a young man to consider as he rolled down alone toward camp. Until this hour this had been a fight without the law; now the possibility loomed that a sovereign State's authority might step in and help in thwarting this persecution which was being showered upon Ellen Richards.

In one way he was loath to appeal to authority, to turn to resources other than his own; but complications were injecting themselves into the problem. He was convinced now, as firmly as he had ever

been convinced in his life, that this whole affair was without old Tom's knowledge or consent. His rage against his father was wholly gone before a feeling that the old man was peculiarly dependent on him for aid in clearing his name of the smirch that had been placed on it in this community. This responsibility tugged at his heart, stirred some of his deepest emotions. Besides, it would be necessary to set old Tom right in Ellen's eyes before he could say all the things to her that he had to say.

Gorbel was the man, he told himself savagely. This was Gorbel's doing from first to last. When Gorbel pleaded with Ellen that he was no party to her trouble and was helpless to aid her, he lied. When men blamed Tom Belknap for desperate things which had happened they did so because they believed Gorbel's insidious, crafty lies. His father, after years of wisely picking his men, had at last involved himself with a rascal.

But setting opinions to rights, the releasing of this urge for Ellen Richards which was growing so enormously in his heart, could not command his first attention. It was not time for that. Other things crowded in before them. He must, above all, keep the Richards Lumber Company alive until he could force matters to clear themselves.

He went at once to Jack Tait and they stood outside the barn and talked. In the beginning the barn boss nodded mildly from time to time; at the end he was spitting tobacco juice and his old eyes were ablaze with enthusiasm.

A team—a white team—came in off the job at noon. The teamster was put at other work. The wood butcher had chopped stove length sticks in two and had charred them in the blacksmith shop, as car blocks are treated.

At two o'clock Jack Tait hitched the white horses to a light sleigh, tossed the freshly made blocks in and drove off, chewing furiously.

John went out with the loads and when he dropped off at the crossing, Waybill looked at him inquiringly.

"Jim and his wife, here, are going to paint Shoestring tonight." John laughed. "I just wanted to see that you got up the hump. Jack Tait's bringing in a team and I'll ride back with him. S'long! Have a good time, Jim, and buy the missus pop-corn! Where do you hide the key, in case I want to get warm?"

"On top the door casing, to the left."

"Right. Good luck."

He stood there as the train broke over to the downgrade, rocking in the late afternoon stillness toward Shoestring.

It was very quiet; a light snow was falling, flakes large and feathery, blotting out the tracks men had made not long before. He strolled down the main line, down over the break, on for twenty rods. There he paused, looked right and left and nodded grimly.

At dusk he heard Jack Tait coming and walked out to meet him.

"We'll carry the blocks over," he said. "This snow might stop; runner tracks wouldn't be so good. Horse tracks are harder to trace."

While Jack fed his team John went into Jim's house and telephoned on the private line, with no chance of a central operator overhearing. He called for the mill foreman's office and when Roberts answered, he said crisply:

"It's Steele, Roberts. How do things stand?"

"Not so good. We've only got thirty thousand in the yards tonight and it's snowing here. If she starts to blow, it'll be worse than not so good."

"Now, listen; and don't ask questions. Get your supper as soon as you can, come back to your office and stand by the telephone."

"O.K," answered the man.

John and Jack ate a cold meal hastily and went outside. From the sleigh they carried arm loads of charred blocks and strung them along the track down beyond the break in the grade. This done, Jack took the evener from his sleigh, hooked a decking chain to it and drove his team across the tracks to the long line of B. & G. loads, waiting on the switch.

The wings of the plow had shoved the snow back to give ample room. Jack hooked his chain to the arch bar of the first car's front trucks while John knocked the blocks from the wheels and mounted the car, grasping the brake wheel.

"All right," he said, and Jack spoke to his horses.

They leaned into the collars, strained, hung, and then the car slowly started to move.

With the wheels once turning, it was easy. Out on to the main line they trundled and John set the brake gradually, driving the shoes tighter against the wheels as the grade became pronounced.

"Steady, now, she wants to roll!"

He was straining on the wheel with all his weight. Jack pulled in his team until slack of the chain dangled in the snow, unhooked, seized a block and held it on the rail before the wheel while the tire munched into its charred surface. In its own length the car came to a grudging halt. Quickly they thrust more blocks in place and turned the team backward.

DOWN they came with another car, repeating the process, careful to let it ease most gently against the first they had moved, blocking it securely, making the coupling fast. Back again. . . .

They spoke but little and then in undertones, though they were miles from other ears. The hauls grew shorter as they increased the length of this train they made up. Snow fell faster. Ankle deep, shin deep, light, fluffy flakes.

The last car went into place; the final coupling was made.

"Get your team back to the sleigh, now," John whispered. "I'll call Roberts."

In the house again he rang the mill office and the foreman answered at once.

"Is the last yard switch open?" John asked.

"Ought to be. Always is. That's orders. Yes, I can see the light from here."

"That's good proof, but I wish you'd take a run out there and be sure."

"Why—well—why, sure. If you say so."

The man was evidently mystified and John hung up. Jack came in, a hulking figure in the gloom, moving on tip-toe, like a prowler.

"Got to be sure," John told him. "The switch always has been left open at night so any chance runaway wouldn't go straight through the mill. But we've got to be *dead* sure!"

"Lord yes," chuckled the other. "If they went in on the main line, now, wouldn't they raise hell?"

The bell tinkled.

"She's open," Roberts said briefly. The spirit of the night's work evidently had made itself apparent even over the wire.

"Then stay in your office and keep your eyes open. And if anybody starts down that yard get 'em back!"

Out they went, carrying axes. Up on to the first car John climbed and released the brakes. Jack knocked the blocks from the wheels. Back to the next, repeating the operation; a third and a fourth were released. The train stirred a bit as the freed wheels took up slack. Another wheel spun, more blocks were knocked out. Jack tossed his ax into the snow and ran to the next car, letting the brake wheel spin as John passed him at a run.

A game of leap frog, they played. The train was chucking, groaning, as the freed cars on the far end strained at the anchorage formed by those at the rear. As John mounted the third from the last, it moved a trifle.

"Snappy!" he yelled at Jack as he dropped into the snow.

The string was moving, now, wheels of the last car sliding, squealing. He grabbed the handrail and swung up the step. He kicked the dog loose and spun the wheel.

"Jump!" yelled Tait as he stood aside, and John jumped as the cars gained momentum on their downward flight.

They went slowly at first, until those cars on the grade dragged the others off the level track. They slipped easily, on smooth running wheels. They picked up speed. The steel commenced to ring a

bit instead of rumble and as they took the first curve the couplings banged and clacked.

Fresh snow, fallen on the logs, began to whip away, in light, shattering blocks, in streamers of dust. Fire streamed from a wheel as they swung another bend. The clatter of trucks over rail joints was like hail on a roof.

A curved log rolled in its nest, turning one end upward. It went off, shattering the stump it struck, bouncing high again, burying itself in snow. Fast and faster, now, the train ran, flying down the grade, storming over the level stretches, assaulting the short pitches as though in conscious effort to keep going, to increase the momentum of its flight.

The cars careened, they rolled, they jumped and bounced. The last, yanked along by the others, tilted and tipped dangerously on curves. It threatened to go over. It lost a part of its load, but it held the rails. Runaways don't leave the track. They stay by it until stopped or smashed in their flight.

The roaring echoed among the hills. The speed became mad. Logs were stirring restlessly between the stakes, twisting, writhing, trying to fly off as the rails changed the direction of that stampede of wheels. But the stakes were good; the logs could grumble and shift and protest but not many could get away.

On through the choppings, on along the sides of hills; through narrow ravines debouching into wider valleys; level track could not slow them; short rises had no more than a barely perceptible influence on the pace. They broke over the last pitch and any there might have seen the lights of Shoestring strung like blurred jewels through the snow a quarter of a mile away.

It seemed to Tait and John standing there in the silence that they could hear the clangor of those runaways until they stopped. The sound came echoing back to them through the falling snow, faint and fainter, but still there.

They shoved caps from their ears to hear better; they strained, with cocked heads.

"Hear it yet?" John whispered.

Jack shook his head.

"Just a mite!"

"Sure?"

"No—not sure."

He turned, then, and ran into the house. Roberts answered his ring.

"Anything happened?" John asked.

"Happened! Lord, Steele!" The man's voice cackled with excitement. "D'you ever hear about it rainin' frogs?"

"Once."

"And manna? It rained that, didn't it?"

"No, ravens brought—"

"Well, it come, anyhow, but what I wanted to ask is, d'you ever hear of it's rainin' saw logs into a hungry mill yard?"

"No. But I've prayed for it!"

"Eh? You what? You prayed for it!" He could hear the man draw a great breath. "Well, Steele, I'm here to say that if ever I want a whole lot and real bad I'm goin' to get you to pray about a dime's worth for me! Say, the's saw logs strung from hell to breakfast in this here yard. It'll be a mess to untangle but if she blows, now, we can saw for a week!"

"Fair enough, Roberts. And you know nothing else except that it rained logs on you tonight."

"That's all I want to know. I'm part clam. Good night!"

When the crossing was half a mile behind, Jack Tait, beside John on the sleigh seat, commenced to laugh. He laughed through his nose, first; then through his mouth. He bent forward and rocked backward with it. He slapped the robe over his knees and roared aloud until the team broke into an alarmed trot.

"Wh-whoa, you!" he gasped. "Don't run your ribs bare. Cripes, John, I feel like I uster feel on Hallerween! I guess that'll upset old Belknap for a minute!"

John had been laughing himself, but sobered now. The job was safe for a few additional days; Ellen was not so near the ragged edge. But she was near enough, and it was his father who was believed to be trying to force her over the brink.

CHAPTER XI

LOGS FOR THE SAWYER

JOHN was in the camp office a few minutes before dinner time when the telephone rang.

He had talked over that instrument once today, to an amazed and bewildered Ellen.

"Do you know what happened?" she asked.

"I'd heard, yes. Heard it tore up the main line."

"Oh, they fixed that in half an hour. Tiny was only a little late getting out. Of course, they're not our logs. What am I going to do?"

John was grinning. This was not the sort of thing to reveal wholly to a girl yet. Tactics such as this are men's affairs.

"I don't know. I've got to fix it up with Burke, somehow. I don't see how we can use their logs legally; I don't see how they're going to get them out without jimming us up. We'll have to go carefully, Ellen." Her gasp, he thought, was a bit dismayed.

"Don't worry," he assured her.

But this was not Ellen calling again. It was Burke, as John had known the man would call, or come.

"Steele? Burke, talking. That was a nice one somebody pulled!"

"I'm with you! Why the devil can't your help block their loads so they're not running away and cluttering up other folk's mill yards?"

"Say, you can forget that line right now! You know damned well that those loads didn't run away!"

"Well, if you know it all, prove something and suggest something."

"All right. We want our logs back!"

"Then go get 'em and send 'em around by the main line."

"Wh-what? Why, that's a two hundred mile haul. No, sir. We expect you to deliver those logs back to the crossing and stand a lawsuit if you put a single one of 'em through your mill!"

John grinned.

"We're no common carrier," he said. "You've got us on the haul in; you've no hold on us the other way. It's up to you to prove that those logs are anything but a nuisance to the Richards Company. We can't litter the yard with 'em. If you don't get 'em out at once we'll have to saw 'em."

"Why, you know damned well that to load there and send 'em around to Kampfest by main line would eat up their value!"

"Of course I know that. I'm glad you realize it. There's only one thing for you to do—accept our logs to replace yours. We'll take your scale, if it looks fair. Otherwise, the courts are run to settle just such arguments."

"A lot of business you've got in court on such a deal!"

"We'd take our chances. Is that all?"

"Wait a minute!"

The man evidently turned aside and cupped his hand over the transmitter while he talked with some one.

"I've got nothing else to say except that we expect to have our logs back at the crossing by the end of the week!"

"And you tell whoever 's there coaching you that logs are cluttering things up down below. If they aren't loaded out day after tomorrow we'll start in sawing 'em. Goodby!"

He slammed up the receiver and turned away, eyes laughing.

He was on shaky ground, he knew, but he had misgivings on only one point—that he had been so firm in his stand that Gorbel might take the matter out of Burke's hands and make his protest in person. He did not want to confront Paul Gorbel yet; he was not ready to have his identity known in the country. He pondered the possibilities at length and finally decided that the general manager of an operation as big as Belknap & Gorbel would not be chasing up the employees of another company. He would let Burke do the rest of the talking for him as Burke had done just now. To be sure, Gorbel might resort to the courts, but John would cross that bridge when he

came to it. An immediate and pressing need had been filled.

He would not have been so comfortable had he been aware of one incident which transpired after supper that night. He was in the office with Mark and Jack Tait when a light driving team came trotting silently into camp. The driver stepped down, tied the near horse to a sapling and approached the little building with a stride which bespoke determination. At the steps which led to the doorway, he slowed, however. Light streamed through a window upon him; he glanced inside and stopped—almost with a jolt.

John was standing where the rays of the hanging lamp fell full on his face, holding pipe in one hand and burning match in the other as he listened to Mark Saunders argue hotly with the barn boss over an item of procedure. The one outside did not look at the others, did not strain to overhear what was being said. He watched John only, closely, and after a moment he laughed softly to himself.

A man came out of the cook shanty and walked toward the office. The visitor tugged at the vizor of his fur cap and turned to meet him.

"Say, Jack," he said, "where's Steele?"

"Ain't he in the office, there?" the other countered. "Sure he is! That's him, standin' up there."

"Oh, thanks," and with a muttered word about tying his team the man turned away from the buildings. He did no tying; he untied the one horse, mounted the seat and drove away smartly, not tucking the robe about his legs until he was well out of camp.

Then Paul Gorbel pulled the horses to a walk and lighted a cigar. He smoked rapidly, as he thought rapidly. He had gone into the Richards' woods headquarters tonight to threaten and badger this stranger named Steele who was going so far in upsetting the fruition of a carefully laid plan. But he had not talked to him, had not thought of stolen logs from the moment he looked through that window. John Belknap, masquerading as John Steele!

That fear which had never left him since he realized that his eagerness had put him into Tucker's hands took on new proportions. He gnawed his cigar between puffs. For years he had been most circumspect; for years he had worked to secure the trust and respect of men; not that he cared for the intrinsic values of these possessions, but because they would serve a purpose when the time came. Now the time had come; he was stepping forth from the security of his good standing to take some of the things he wanted and time was short. John Belknap was in his way, costing him precious days.

Why the assumed name? He grasped that question and followed its various ramifications and possibilities. He smoked less feverishly after a time. He removed the cigar from his mouth and laughed once, briefly and without mirth. Then he cut his team cruelly with the whip and drove on past camp where he had planned to spend the night, speeding for Kampfest. Let Burke handle the affair of stolen logs. That was a detail. If John Belknap wanted to get away with it, well and good. Larger matters commanded his attention.

JOHN BELKNAP'S position had suddenly become untenable. He had come into the employ of Ellen Richards with a single purpose and, to serve that purpose, it was well enough to seize on a fortuitous circumstance which would let her think that men had always known him as John Steele. But another and a graver purpose had loomed over the horizon of his desires and it gave him almost the feeling of a skulker to continue the deception. A man can't make love to a girl when he has led her to think that he is another. About such a situation, under the circumstances, was something unclean. A man does not want to tell the girl he loves only part of what there is to tell. He wants to tell it all, every sentence, word and syllable.

He did not consider the dangers lurking in the possibility of Ellen's discovery

of his masquerade; his first worry was on a more lofty plane than that, but her feeling against his father was also the first obstacle which he must remove. That would let him come into the open, let him be rid of this distasteful handicap of deception.

He had something to work on now. If Nat Bradshaw, the sheriff, could pin the barn fire on Paul Gorbel, it would be like a loose thread in woven fabric, would permit him to unravel the whole sorry story which had plunged Ellen into such distress and cast such an unfair and unwarranted cloud over old Tom Belknap in the girl's eyes.

He had written the sheriff at length the night after Young, the B. & G. filer, had told his story, not trusting word of that to script, but setting down a theory as he had evolved it and outlining a program for the well intentioned, likable but slow thinking officer to follow. This afternoon Bradshaw had telephoned that certain investigations had been made and John rode in with the logs to determine what he had learned.

He was with Ellen in the office after the others had gone and, being there, with this growing sense of guilt on his conscience, made him as uncomfortable as he had ever been in his life. He found a host of inhibitions rising within him to make him curt, impersonal, when he wanted more than anything else to chuck talk of the job and talk to the girl of herself.

His mood puzzled her, he saw; she had expected something other than this after their last talk in camp, and once he saw her biting her lip as if in chagrin. He was impelled to burst out into explanation, then, but checked himself. What could come of it? He must bide his time until he could tell her all and he could not tell her all until he could show her beyond any doubt that it was Paul Gorbel and not his father who merited her contempt and distrust.

He was in a fever to accomplish this end as he entered the jail office and greeted Bradshaw.

"Been waitin' for you," the sheriff said, closing the door and scratching his head. "Sit, Steele. I done what you told me but it didn't seem to get us anywhere. Everything looks straight as a string."

"So? Just what did you find?"

"Well, I did just what you suggested in your letter might be done. I went to Kampfest yesterday and made the point that the county didn't want to bury this lad and tried to locate his relatives. I was careful to ask around in other places and, just as you figured, nobody could help. Then I went to Gorbel, like it was kind of a last resort, and apologized for troublin' him on it and he tells the straightest story you ever heard. If he's crooked, he's too smart for us. And maybe we're guessin' wrong all along the line."

"What did he offer?"

"Hell, he told me ev'rything! He told the straightest story a man ever listened to. He'd fired this man himself, he said, because he was full of moon. He found him half crocked in camp that afternoon and sent him out. He said you could smell hooch on the next forty and he calculated the lad had a jug cached somewhere. Said my guess was a good one—that he'd started down the track, takin' a pull every little while, crawled into your barn, tried to smoke and touched her off. Said it again and again, that the man'd been drunk as a lord.

"I didn't let on that I'd expected to hear any different. The only thing was that he kept harping away on this hooch. If there was anything else to go on, we might figure on trippin' him up in his story. If he's lying, he sure is a good hand at it."

"What do you suppose he'd say if he knew we had a witness to his handing over a jug to this man? And if the witness was pretty certain the jug was filled with gasoline?"

"Huh?" Bradshaw gaped. "Witness? You mean—"

John nodded.

"Witness!" he said sharply. "I've got him, Nat!"

Rapidly he recounted what Young had

told him and the sheriff's eyes grew round with excitement.

"Damn me," he kept interjecting. "Damn me, if I wasn't 'bout ready to let him get away with it! He was so sure, an' just because the lad was kicked to death an' not burned wasn't much to go on."

"He won't get away with it," John declared. "Now, the next move is to upset Gorbel's own story. He told you over and over that the man was drunk, which would fit into what folks think we believe. Young doesn't think he was and if that stomach hasn't alcohol in it then Paul Gorbel's well on his way toward being caught for arson; and arson isn't a joking matter in court, Nat!"

"I'll say! I'll say it ain't! Damn me, we'll have a de-buryin' and we'll see what we see!" He leaned back and lighted his cigar with excited movements. "Johnny, you got somethin' under your hat besides hair!"

They talked until late and John went to his bed with hopes high. If he could develop a criminal case against Gorbel he believed the man would crack and tell the truth, because that would force the whole affair into a public light and few men dared confront his father with untruth. However, if Paul still clung to his story that these dark tactics were on old Tom's orders, feeling temporarily safe because of Belknap's absence, then John could go to Ellen and insist that she suspend her judgment of his father until he could come to Shoestring himself and confront his business partner. No man could stand by falsehood in the presence of Tom Belknap's temper.

NOW when Paul Gorbel drove into Kampfest the night before, fear and hate and a measure of jealousy rode with him. But when he entered his office in the morning he was the efficient, complacent executive that men had known for years. They, of course, could not know that apprehension was growing, forming a burden on his heart. He went to the Bank of Kampfest, gave orders to the cashier, visited a moment and returned to follow the daily routine.

He stood in the doorway that evening as the mill men streamed by, and when Tucker approached he called the man to him.

He began to talk safely, a bit rapidly. A girl came out of the office, modishly wrapped in a fur coat, a different sort of figure than those you will see on the streets of a Northern mill town. Gorbel broke his talk to Tucker.

"Oh, Marie!" The girl turned, showing a white face under the light, lips heavy with makeup, even, gleaming teeth. "I'll have some letters this evening. About eight?"

"All righty!" She went on and Gorbel turned again to Tucker, lowering his voice.

When he had finished the man nodded.

"Hell, yes! She wouldn't have him there if she guessed. Why, I've heard her burn old Tom up! Sweet on him? I dunno. Say, now, that mornin' he took the plow in after I'd ditched it, they didn't look like boss and hired hand, at that."

He could not see his employer's face change, the mouth settle into a bitter, desperate line. They talked further . . .

Gorbel had told the stenographer to return at eight. He, however, was in his office before seven, writing slowly. He paused frequently, scratched out words, tore up paper, began again.

The outer door opened and closed; his office knob turned and the girl came in.

" 'Lo—!" in a half whisper.

He spoke without looking up.

She took off her coat, removed the snug turban, pulled off her goloshes and stood revealed, a silken legged, low necked, short sleeved slip of a girl with eyes that might have been gentle, but were not, with a mouth that might have been tender, but was not.

"What's on?" she asked, fluffing her bobbed hair and approaching, laying a hand familiarly on Gorbel's shoulder and leaning over to read what he was writing.

He slipped a sheet of paper over the penciled lines.

"Not yet!"

"What's the big idea?" she asked, hostility in the tone, drawing back. Her face was suddenly unpleasant to look upon.

He caught her wrist roughly and laughed as he drew her to his chair arm.

"Hot headed baby!" he breathed and kissed her arm. "It's a letter to another girl. But when you've read it through you'll understand. And I'm going to let you read."

He patted her back and the temper receded from her face slowly.

"Well, ever since I caught you writing to this Richards party, and found out you'd been going to see her and lying to me about it, I've naturally been suspicious."

"Good Lord, have we got to have that over again? Hasn't it been explained well enough to satisfy even your jealousy?"

"Well, it was—once. But what's a girl to think? I come up from Chicago on the promise I'm going to be a respectable married woman,"—ironically. "I wait and whine and beg and am put off until—"

"Can't you see?" he pleaded impatiently. "You know the state things are in now. Let me get hold of this Richards property on my own, let me get things running here as they should go and I'll throw you a party, preacher and all, that'll startle even Florida!"

"Well, seeing's believing."

"And what I've got on, now, is just about the knockout. I want you to read this and hold your temper until you get to the end. I want you to copy it on plain paper and address an envelope. I'm going to mail it. Read, Marie—a bombshell!"

He thrust the paper into her hands and watched her face as she read.

"Well, for gosh sakes!" was her comment, blue eyes widening in amazement. "Is it a fact?"

"Sure as you're born." He slapped the desk. "See what it means? See what it'll do?" He talked rapidly, eyes narrowed in earnestness.

The girl listened, and when he had finished she took a long breath.

"You're the cats when it comes to scheming." She was silent a moment, thrusting out her lower lip. "If it was anybody else, I'd be sorry for her! Seems not so hot to be dividing up what a girl's got. But her—*pfugh!* If you ever look at her again, I'll give her a boy bob and no mistake. And maybe trim you along with it!"

She took the chair he had vacated and drew writing materials toward her, preparing to copy what he had written.

"But if old Tom ever heard what's been going on," she said, "it'd be like him to give you the run-around and pay her for what you've broken!"

"He won't know—for another sixty days. And if this works—" gesturing toward his handwriting— "she'll give him the air and she'll be sold out and I'll own the Richards Lumber Company. I've got Tom tied up to a price on my interest here. He can pay that and rave all he wants to then!"

The girl looked at him sharply.

"Better not let him find out about the deals with the North Star Company."

"What do you know about that?" he asked.

The girl giggled.

"Maybe I just guessed it; maybe I know it all; maybe I know nothing. So long as you play the game with me, dearie, I play along with you. Just that long!"

With an amused smile she began to write.

CHAPTER XII

DISMISSAL

TWO DAYS later. Shortly after noon, as he entered the office, the clerk wheezed to John:

"Ellen telephoned. She said for you to come in with the loads tonight, sure."

"Anything else?"

"That's all. She said to be sure."

John wondered. Usually when Ellen wanted to get in touch with him she left word for him to call. He rang the office in town and asked for her.

"Who is it?" the bookkeeper asked after a moment.

"Steele, at camp."

Another interval; indistinct sounds came over the wire; then the man's voice—

"She says she'll see you tonight."

So it was with his curiosity roused and a mass of misgivings that John left the train after its late arrival, crossed the mill yard and entered the street.

Lights were burning in the office and he hastened in.

"Hello," he said, opening the door and seeing Ellen alone at her desk.

She lifted her head slowly and turned on him a face that was a mask of reserve. She was white and drawn and her eyes smoldered.

"Hello, Ellen. You sent for me? What's —what's the matter?"

She had spoken no word; she did not need to speak to make him understand that catastrophe was in the air.

She put down her pen slowly, opened a purse that lay on the desk beside her and took out a letter.

"Explain this," she said and her tone was like ice. She seemed to be restraining herself, clinging with all her strength to her self-control.

Frowning, he took the envelope from her. Her name and address were written on it. The postmark, he saw, was Kampfest.

"Why—why, what's—"

"Read it!" she said and her manner forbade further questioning.

He shook out the single sheet of paper with hands that trembled.

Dear Friend:—In times of trouble it is up to women to stand together. I have known something for weeks that has been on my conscience. If you will look back you will see that most of the trouble which has come to you has been since the man who calls himself John Steele came to work for you. You may recall the things he apparently has done in your behalf; consider the things that have happened. This superintendent of yours conspired with Tucker, your road master, to cause two wrecks on your railroad. He discharged Tucker to make his game seem convincing. Your barn was burned at his orders and a harmless tramp lost his life in it.

Certain accomplishments have been placed to his credit. Your property, were it not for its being so heavily involved, would be on its feet. If your creditors should force you out, now, they would be in a position to make the operation pay from the hour they took charge, thanks to what this so-called John Steele has done for them, under guise of doing it for you.

All this may sound beyond belief, but just ask this Steele whether or not he is using his own name or if he is not known elsewhere as John Steele Belknap.

Yours in sympathy,

—A FRIEND

His heart seemed to have stopped. Strength went from his legs. He blinked his eyes and raised his brows high to drive off the dizziness.

"Why, that's a lie!" he choked. "That's a black, infamous—"

"Wait a minute!" She had risen, now, and stood before him, breathing fast and irregularly. "What—" she asked, as though her voice would break— "is your name?"

"Why, that part's all right. I can explain it. I am John Belknap. I did—"

"And this! Explain this! I remembered, you see!"

She whipped a telegram from her desk, thrusting it toward him. It was from the State Bank of Ferrysville, the nearest bank to Witch Hill.

WITCH HILL LUMBER CO. OWNED BY BELKNAP LUMBER CO., CHICAGO STOP S. McIVER IS SUPERINTENDENT.

"Why—why, yes, Ellen. That's all true. But, you see, I couldn't let you think I'm who I am. I couldn't come in here and offer to help you, admitting my own name, could I?" His words, he knew, fell against deaf ears.

"Why not?" she asked, bitingly.

"You wouldn't have believed me, feeling as you have about my father."

She laughed with a wildness which startled him.

"Right! How right you are—" swaying backward and grasping her desk for support. "I wouldn't have believed, no! I wouldn't have let a Belknap set foot on my property! I didn't believe that anonymous letter when it came in; I didn't want to. My first impulse was to tear it up, forget it. And then I remembered that my father always said a man who was right could stand investigation. I looked up Witch Hill, I telegraphed that bank and you've read the answer."

She paused, panting.

"But, Ellen—"

"Never mind! I'm going to talk, now! It's a woman's privilege to talk, isn't it? I've heard it said it's a woman's privilege to have the last word, too. Well, I'm having it, John Steele Belknap.

"No, you didn't dare reveal yourself. So you have a superintendent write a lie. You may have worked as camp foreman for him, but not as John Steele. He knew you weren't John Steele. He knew your full name because it was your father's money that paid him, your father's money that sent you in here!"

"Ellen, Ellen! Listen to me! He's a poor, old, ignorant man—Sandy. He's a man who's never written a letter of recommendation before. He simply forgot, confused as—as he— Don't you see?" He was stammering now, as her bitter smile showed him how unconvincing his own words sounded.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" she asked, suddenly calm.

He drew a deep breath.

"No," he said, and shook his head. "It sounds— It won't do, true as it is!"

"And will any of the rest do? Can you explain all that's happened? You've done things, yes, but I see now why you did them. You did just enough to get the job in shape so that when your father and his partner and his son—" hissing the word— "ruin this company, it will be a going concern. You've made a showing in the woods; you've done just enough for the mill to keep the job afloat until you could close down on us!"

She made a gesture of dismissal with one small fist.

"I've been such a fool! I suppose it was all staged, that first encounter you had with Paul Gorbel here. Well, you did it admirably. I'll give you credit for that! You fooled me; you worked me up emotionally until I was ready to grasp at anything for help. And I grasped—at Tom Belknap's son."

"It sounds logical," he said wearily. "It sounds reasonable. It looks like a staged drama, yes. But, Ellen, dear, won't you believe me when I say that I came to you that night determined to *fight* my father! That I had no inkling of the trouble here, that I stumbled into it and that when I found a woman was running this job I was bowled over!

"Won't you believe that I jumped in, first, to settle a grudge against my father and that I have gone far enough, now, to be convinced that he has no hand in all this trouble that has been made for—"

"Stop! Stop! I beg of you, stop!" she broke in, stamping a foot. "Don't treat me like a child, John Belknap! If you'd come in here and told me your name, it would have been different; but you started with a lie, a *lie!* A carefully prepared lie! And anything founded on a lie must be evil; it doesn't need all the logic pointed out in this letter that came to me today to give it the color of evil.

"Tom Belknap not fighting me? Tom Belknap not trying to ruin me?" Tears sprang to her eyes. "Black is white, east is west— Oh, John Belknap, what a fraud you are!

"And when I think of all the things, the little things, to your mind, the big things, in mine—" her voice broke. "The morning after the fire, when you wanted me to go with Uncle—wanted to get me away, out of the country! And when you—when you held me in your arms and promised to say— Thank heaven, you didn't say them! There *must* be something decent in you, after all, because you

could have made your fake love to me the other night. I wondered why you hurried away; it hurt me, then. Thank heaven you *did!* Oh, what a mess you've made; what a mess!"

She dropped into her chair, elbows on desk, hands over her face.

"Ellen!" He tried to touch her but she shook off his hand.

"Don't touch me! Don't come near me! Don't let me ever hear the sound of your voice or see your face again! To think—to think that only yesterday I thought—I hoped—I wanted— Oh, won't you get out?" She dropped her hands and turned her distressed, tear wet eyes to him. "Won't you please go now? Won't you please go away from me? Let me alone, now, with what I've got left. Won't you—if you have any decency left in you?"

Panting, shaken, white; weak as if from prolonged physical combat he backed away.

"I'll go," he said brokenly. "I'll go—but I'll be near. I'll be helping you. I'm —I'm what I am. Time may show it but—I'm going."

He turned toward the door quickly, feet unsteady on the floor.

BEWILDERED to a point where he felt remorse almost as profound as would have been his lot had he been scheming to ruin Ellen Richards' property, John Belknap, no longer masquerading as John Steele, left the girl's office and made his way to the hotel where he had lived when in town.

He evaded the loquacious Rex Jasper, the proprietor, ate a perfunctory meal and went slowly up the stairs to his cubicle of a room. He dropped to the creaking bed and sat there, hands dangling between his knees for a long interval, frowning at the floor, breathing as though just in from extreme physical exertion.

The case that Ellen had built up against him was so logical. Even without being unstrung to a state which bordered on hysteria, she would have been justified in believing that he had come to Shoestring with design, that old Sandy's letter, once considered a fortuitous blunder, was deliberate misrepresentation, and that he had, in fact, simply prepared the Richards operation for smooth functioning once it had been forced from her hands.

He had needed time to prove his conviction that it was not old Tom who had instigated this unfair, ruthless, at points criminal, competition. Gorbel was doing it, he was certain; doing it to serve his own personal ends; doing it without old Tom's knowledge or consent. A subtle, shrewd, cautious schemer, Gorbel; a man no one trusted—except his father.

John stirred and shook his head despairingly. If old Tom were only within reach! But he was not. No, he was on his own for the next six weeks, anyhow. And much can happen in six weeks to a concern as crowded as the Richards Lumber Company.

He was in a pinch; beaten in his lofty ambition to champion the oppressed; a growing love had been hurled back into his teeth. But he laughed. He laughed, sitting there alone in the bare little room, and the laugh had in it a defiance, a challenge to the fates which had woven this net of circumstances about him.

He rose to his full height and flexed his arms. He was not through; he had only begun. What the next step would be he had not even a guess. He needed time to think that out, but of two things was he certain: Gorbel was not going to drive Ellen's company to the wall and Ellen was not to go on thinking for much longer that his father was behind her trouble. With those ends accomplished this other, this cold weight about his heart, this personal trouble, the first, dismaying, heart-breaking situation he had ever faced, would be ready for the solving.

But he could not stay on in Shoestring. It would avail him nothing; it would only bring him continued distress. He did not know what to plan.

He paced the room, pondering, and came to a halt beside the spotted little dresser. Last week's Shoestring *Banner*

lay there and he stared at the smudgy lines, unseeing—unseeing until his idly roving eyes fell on the heavily typed words:

BELKNAP & GORBEL

He leaned lower and read what was above them:

MEN WANTED!

FOR MILLS AND CAMPS
MODERN BUILDINGS; GOOD WAGES

BELKNAP & GORBEL
KAMPFEST

He remained bent over a long moment and then straightened, tongue in his cheek.

Why not? He asked himself. He was a man out of a job, a good man. Paul Gorbel was advertising for men . . .

He began to pack hastily, movements a bit feverish.

He caught Bradshaw just as the sheriff was leaving the jail.

"Something new?" the sheriff asked as he turned back and read the excitement in the boy's eyes.

"A lot—about something you've never guessed!"

He plunged into his story with the pronouncement that he had been living and working and fighting under another name. The other's jaw dropped and for an interval his gray eyes were hard with suspicion, but as John talked on, earnestly, honestly, convincingly, leaving out nothing except his personal relationship with Ellen, that look altered and mellowed and the big officer began to nod slowly. He could see; he was a man and not involved, not a woman, with everything she possessed, including her heart, at stake!

When the boy had finished, Nat drew a long breath and let it out in a soft whistle.

"A pickle!" he said, wrinkling his brow. "A pickle! It's a tough break for you, son, but I'm going to string along. Huh!" He narrowed his eyes and considered. "It's prob'ly so, what you think about your father. This Gorbel, now, has got by up here about a hundred per cent. His men like him, he's got a reputation for the fairest kind of dealing. But, lookin' back, I can see some smart work.

"Your dad was here a month before you showed up. I mind hearin' he was goin' on a trip. And the first trouble started after he left. Gorbel started gumming up Ellen's road with his logs; this rough party Baxter showed up and knocked Royce for a goal. He likely figured to do it all while your pa was away, thinkin'—and right, too—that news of his first skirmishes wouldn't get to Chicago before the old man left."

He lighted his cigar and crossed his legs.

"Your pa, now, is a good figure to pick on and give a bad name. Most rich men are supposed to be without any scruple. Working men'll believe that before they will any good of 'em. Course, he's never operated in here before, but I've always heard him spoken of well by the few old-timers I've known who worked for him. By jocks, come to think back, they all liked him! It sort of looks, John, like our case has a lot of angles."

By livery team and through the night, John drove to Kampfest, all his wordly possessions in the pack-sack, a new and resolute purpose overriding the undertone of sorrow and misgiving in his heart.

JOHN was the first to enter Paul Gorbel's office after he had seated himself at his desk for another day's work.

The man looked up and if he experienced any reaction other than surprise, he covered it well.

"Of all things!" he exclaimed. "John Belknap! Where'd you come from—?" rising and extending his hand.

"Don't get up," John said with curt formality, and ignored the proffered hand.

"Well, you're about the last person I expected to see walk in here this morning."

John looked at him with close scrutiny as he said:

"Yes. That's easy to understand." He thought the man's face changed a trifle and that a flicker of dismay showed in those dark, intelligent eyes. "I didn't figure that you'd expect me."

"Up from Chicago?"

And now a decided but still subtle alteration was in the eyes; Gorbel seemed to be steeling himself, rallying all his quick wits to an emergency.

"No. I haven't been in Chicago in over six weeks. I've been at Shoestring, running the Richards' job."

"Shoestring? Richards?" His counterfeit of amazement was splendid.

"Why, yes. Didn't you know, Gorbel?" John scrutinized the other in open hostility. "I supposed of course you knew that I'd been there, using the name of John Steele and trying to pull the operation out of the hole it's in."

And now a faint trace of color started to climb Gorbel's cheeks as he resumed his chair and gestured toward another. But John did not sit down. He stood there, staring hard at his father's partner.

"Some one in Kampfest tipped Miss Richards off to the fact that I hadn't dared use my father's name when I struck her for a job. I was let out yesterday, a bit discredited!"

"Well I'll be damned!" breathed Gorbel, and John's temper flared.

"Forget it!" he snapped. "I'm coming clean with you; be man enough to do as much with me!"

The other was on his feet again, faint color deepening.

"Look here, John, I don't know what the devil you're driving at!"

"Then I'll give it to you. I blundered into a mess over yonder. I found out that a lot of desperate things were being done in my father's name. We'd had a little difference, Tom and I, and I welcomed the chance to hit back at him. I hadn't been on the job long, though, before I realized that what was being done wasn't the sort of plan he'd follow, or countenance. Somebody else was behind it, screening himself behind the Belknap name."

"Good Lord, man! And you're insinuating that I know something about—"

"Know! Why, I heard you make threats to Miss Richards, just a moment before I tossed you out of her office in December!"

The other swayed a bit and the flush of temper yielded to the paling of fear.

"Yes! I thought so!" John muttered. "Let's come clean with each other, Gorbel! From now on, let's fight in the open!"

"Fight? That what you're here for—a fight?"

John pondered and a hard smile flickered about his lips.

"Not unless it's forced, Gorbel. I'm here—on guard, maybe. In the first place, I'm going to stick right here in Kampfest and keep my eyes and my ears open. If unexplainable things keep happening to the Richards' outfit, I'm going to take on the chore of explaining 'em! If Ellen is let alone to make a go of the job—which she can do now with a fair break—you and I'll get along splendidly; if not, then there'll be a war, and you'd better believe it!"

Gorbel summoned a sort of laugh.

"Sir Galahad, eh?"

"Or Pancho Villa! Names don't count, now that I've gotten my own back—" bitterly. "We understand each other, I guess, and all that's left is for you to give me a job."

"Job? After you've made a play like this?"

"Of course, a job. You're advertising for men; you're hiring men every day. I can't just mount guard over you and do nothing else; besides, I'll have a better chance of hearing what's going on if I'm on the payroll. Or are you afraid to have me around?"

Gorbel's mouth twitched.

"A job as an assistant, I suppose?" he asked mockingly. "Or perhaps you'd like to take my place?"

"Don't be young! I expect nothing from you, not even quarter, now. Any job; a job in the woods, in the chemical plant, in the mill. I don't give a continental where I work or what I do!"

Gorbel lighted a cigaret with a hand that was remarkably steady.

"Listen here, John," he began. "You've been guessing at a great many things; you've gone off half-cocked. What you heard me say to Ellen Richards can be explained. It had nothing to do with your father whatever. I—I may have overstepped a trifle in a deal that's entirely outside my obligations to this concern; but nothing more than that. It's my affair. But most certainly I'm not going to even try to start to explain in the face of such an attitude—"

"Explain? Who the devil's asking for an explanation? I'm not interested in what you've got to say, Gorbel. Where and when do I answer the advertisement you've been running in local papers for men?"

Conflict was in Gorbel's eyes. Fright and caution and craft flickered in their depths and out of John Belknap's came a faint gleam, as will show in a man's eyes when inspiration sweeps him.

Gorbel shrugged.

"Very well. Have it your own way. If you want to go to work as a common laborer, good. But I don't know what's open. You might ask McWethy, the mill foreman. If you'd be reasonable, I'd make a place for you, but not now. No, sir, not now."

"Fair enough, Gorbel. That's the first decent impulse you seem to've had since I came in. I'll find McWethy. Good morning!"

He walked toward the door without so much as another look at the man.

WHEN he had gone Paul Gorbel jabbed out the coal from his cigaret with movements which were vicious. His bland face was clouded, lips set and his eyes flared dangerously. He took the desk telephone in his hand and pondered a moment; then called the mill foreman.

"McWethy," he said, and his voice had in it no trace of the emotions reflected on his face. "Young John Belknap is coming down to ask for a job. He's had a row with the old man, I take it. I think you'd better put him in at the bottom. Start him with the pond crew. Fire somebody if you have to."

The girl, Marie, came slipping into the room as he hung up. Her eyes were wide.

"My gosh, it worked!" she whispered.

"Worked!" Gorbel snapped and dropped into his chair. He laughed mirthlessly. "I'll say it worked!"

"What's the matter? Did he guess where the letter came from?"

"If he did, he neglected to mention it. That's no matter. He's guessed the racket, all right, and he's come here to work in the mill so he can keep his damned eyes open."

The girl drew a quick breath but did not speak.

"That'll raise hell," he muttered. "That will raise particular hell. And just when I was sure I had 'em tied up so she'd have to sell to me." He rose and began to pace the rug nervously. "Still, it may not be so bad in one way. If I do let up now, won't she think her finding out about his game had something to do with easier going? That might be an advantage. I'll need all the breaks I can get now—" glancing at a calendar. "The old man'll be on his way back in a month. Maybe it won't be so bad, having the kid here, under my thumb." His tone was not that of one to whom such a thought was new; he rolled the sentence on his tongue as though it had taste and the taste were good. "And everything's tied up, sewed up. He can't be sure of a thing. All he'll have is his damned suspicion."

"Don't be too sure. If he ever tumbles to the North Star deal, look out!"

His head jolted forward, truculently.

"What do you know about North Star?"

"I haven't been a stenog in lumber offices for five years without learning my way around. It's all right if you get away with it. I'd sooner see you two-time a rich old geezer than to throw the harpoon into a girl, even if I could scratch her eyes out! But this John Belknap's

no dumbbell! We knew that down in Chicago; you should know it up here. And if he gets inside this office and gets the same bee in his bonnet that I've got it's the old ball and chain anklet for you, big boy!"

Gorbel wiped his forehead irritably.

"You know too damned much," he said with a snarl.

She flushed beneath her makeup.

"I didn't know enough once, it appears! I believed you and kicked my chances in Chicago over to trail up here. What've I gotten? Promises! More promises! All I get—"

"And a fur coat, and a car, and enough dresses to stock a store; and—"

"Which were only a part of the bargain!" She put a hand on his shoulder and a hard anxiety showed in her wide blue eyes. "Paul! Don't be a goop! Don't try to hog it. I notice that you get what you take. But don't try to take too much, big boy! Don't try to run a racket on old Tom. I've got a stake in you, now. I may fly off the handle now and then and say mean things but, Paul, I'm nutty about you all the time!"

Her mouth trembled.

"Good girl," he said absently and kissed her. "Don't fret. I've done pretty well for myself, so far. I know about where I'm going, even in the dark."

She wiped her eyes and her weak, pretty, unstable little face regained its composure.

"John Belknap, workin' around a mill!" she breathed. "You can't beat it, not with a drumstick!" She started slowly for the door. Hand on the knob she paused, a reminiscent look in her eyes. "My gosh, the thrill he used to give us girls when he walked through the Chicago office!"

CHAPTER XIII

JOHN BELKNAP—LABORER

AND now a young man, scion of great wealth, who had come into the country to create furor by meeting disturbance with disturbance, by demonstrating his ability as a logger to the satisfaction of every one who came in contact with him, was at work at lowly labor.

In calked boots and his heavy clothing he toiled ten hours each day about the hot pond of the property which his father shared with Paul Gorbel.

His immediate superior was a Swede, hailed as Ole, whatever his name might be. His job was to help keep logs going from pond to saw floor as rapidly as the mill reduced them to lumber.

Cars came in alongside the rectangular pond on a track tilted toward the water to speed unloading. The crew tripped the patent stakes, let the loads roll from the cars and bounce and rumble down to the water, kept free of ice by the nigger exhaust. When the logs snarled and tangled on shore, John worked with a peavey, prying them free, rolling them on down. Then, with pike-pole, from shore or from his stand on other logs, he helped tool them to the foot of the steep slide with its endless chain which gripped and dragged them upward to disappear within the mill.

He lived in the company boarding house, a modern, clean, well managed establishment. He spent his first evenings in the company recreation hall, at checkers with other men, playing pool or bowling, or watching moving pictures.

As he toiled during his shift he belonged to the man power which caused to function the most efficient saw mill that ever had been built; as he went to and from his work he passed a chemical plant which was the last word in equipment for the utilization of forest growth that would not serve as raw material for other products. He could see, protruding above the snow, foundations for the building which was to be an experimental laboratory to determine finer usage for what came from the camps. On a hill at the town's edge stood the trim, well equipped hospital.

And all this he had helped plan! During vacation periods at home he had sat late at night with his father, listening, suggesting, on fire with the purpose of high industrial adventure. Of all this he

had lived and worked to be a part, but no such part as he now occupied.

But bitterness on that score had no place in his heart. He was grave, determined, intent; all ears and eyes and memory. He mingled with the men to find that they liked and respected Paul Gorbel; the managing partner had a name as a fair dealer, a benevolent employer. Only vague echoes of trouble at Shoestring had reached Kampfest; in the timber country, and in winter, miles are long, people are concerned with their own affairs.

During those first days and nights he was only another man, one of hundreds, and accepted as such; but toward the end of the week his checker opponent—Foote, a lumber inspector—said, casually—

"You know, Jack, they're saying your name's Belknap."

"It is."

"Are you old Tom's boy?"

John admitted it.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" The other laughed.

As his identity became known it brought some incredulous looks, some good natured skepticism; and soon thereafter he had a distinct feeling that his standing was not what it had been, that now and again a man laughed at him a bit sneeringly.

He wondered about this; set out to find a reason. Inadvertently his boss, Ole, divulged it.

"Big fella like you shouldn't take a spankin'," the man said with a familiar, fatherly chuckle.

"Spanking? Who's spanking me, Ole?"

The Swede laughed again.

"We ban get lots o' noos, Yohn. Don' try to run away from ol' man again! Don't try to do what ole man don' say to do. Big smart fella laak you shoult be all dress' oop; should have slick job in office, not work laak Ole! Better should mind ol' man nax' time, eh?"

So that was it! The story had been spread that John Belknap, son of the push, was being punished for misbehavior. He knew the handicaps under which the owner's son is placed in association with employees; this was the sort of tale well fitted to turn their first friendship into ridicule.

A distorted report of what he had done went through the town. He had been kicked out by his father; he had gone to work for the Richards Company; he had stolen some of his father's logs, had been discharged and ordered to come to Kampfest where he could be under the watchful eye of Gorbel. The son of the push was being disciplined. Well, let it ride, he decided. He had more important things to think about than what people thought of him.

He encountered the town's attitude directly and from the man Baxter; Baxter, the one who, Richards men believed, had been brought in to start trouble and whose rumored coming to Shoestring had staged John's own dramatic entrance into that town.

John had singled the man out his first night in the recreation hall. A great, heavy shouldered, thick bearded ruffian, always seated by the fireplace, spitting copiously, boasting to the younger and weaker men. His tongue was vile, his ego great, and though his job was only that of helper in the repair shop John thought that the man bore himself with a greater degree of confidence than his mere physical superiority and his station warranted.

He passed the fellow and his group one night and heard him mutter—

"Takes a lickin' like a yellah dog!"

He knew, by the turning of heads that the words were about him. He did not like it but gave no indication of having heard. Let that ride! Let everything ride except his sole objective!

IT WAS on Saturday that Nat Bradshaw drove up before the Belknap & Gorbel office, blanketed his team, tossed away his cigar stub, visited with an acquaintance a moment, waved to another; stopped to shake hands with an elderly woman and finally went casually up the steps and into the manager's office.

"Howdy, Paul," he said cheerily.

"Oh, hullo, Sheriff." Gorbel's eyes changing ever so slightly. "Cold."

"Kinda. Time of year for it, anyhow."

"Have a chair. What can I do for you?"

Gorbel cleared his throat sharply.

"Oh, I've got a letter from the wife of one of your boys, here. They've had a row and he's hauled out and left her with a couple kids and don't send her money regularly. She wants him arrested but I don't favor arrestin' any more'n necessary. I wondered if you'd have a talk with him."

Gorbel leaned across the desk to see the letter, perhaps a bit over eagerly, as in relief.

"Anything I can do, of course. Who is he? Oh, I'll look him up and have a talk with him myself."

For several minutes they discussed the case, Gorbel obliging, suave, offering to go to any lengths to help settle the matter.

"Fine of you." Nat started to rise. "Oh, by the way. Seems that this feller who burnt up the Richards stables got a brother down below. He had some kind of fraternal insurance that was void if he met death while drunk. They've written in about it, the company. I s'pose they've got a right to the facts."

He was eyeing his cigar now, but he did not miss Gorbel's slow shift in his chair. He could not see the man's eyes, but he could feel them prying, prying—startled and prying.

"Why, that's only right. I don't like to beat a family out of what might be due, though."

"But he *was* drunk?"

"So soaked he couldn't or wouldn't work."

"And you knew it and gave him the air?"

"Yes. Just as I told you."

"And that was after supper?"

"No. Just before. I told him to get out first thing in the morning, but I got under his skin, I guess. I didn't see him afterward."

"That's right. You told me that before. You don't want to write a letter to the insurance company, then?"

Gorbel cleared his throat again.

"No. I don't. But if they'll make an investigation, I'll tell them what I know, of course."

"But you didn't see him drinking, did you?"

"See him! Sure! He was just emptying a bottle out by our gasoline cache when I caught him."

"I see." The sheriff sighed and stretched. As he leaned back, quick alarm mounted in Paul Gorbel's eyes. "Well, get along, I guess. I'll tell this lodge to make their own investigation, then."

"That's only right." Gorbel was on his feet, now, toying nervously with a pencil. "Drop in again, Nat," he said.

"Will. S'long."

Thus far, Bradshaw, whose wits were no match for Paul Gorbel's agile mind, had made no betraying blunders. He had led his man on, a step at a time, as John had planned he should do, and had gained one tiny step this afternoon. But he did the wrong thing, next. He drove slowly away, not toward Shoestring but down toward the mill. He stopped his team again and walked across the street and Gorbel, from his office window, watched.

An hour later when McWethy, the mill foreman, came in with his daily report, Gorbel met him in the hallway.

"What is Bradshaw prowling around the mill for?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing, I guess. He stopped in to chin a minute and went on out."

"Didn't talk to anybody else?"

"No— Oh, yes, he did go over and visit a minute with young Belknap."

Gorbel turned abruptly into his office and stood beside his desk, biting a lip, frowning. The office workers were going out. He heard their feet in the hallway, leaving in a group. Then, other footsteps, and Marie opened the door.

"Going to dance tonight?" she asked.

He whirled on her, raging.

"Good Lord, Marie, do you think all

I've got to do is *dance*? No! I've got the evening full!"

She bridled at his tone.

"Well, you needn't be so rough about it!"

"And you needn't nag day after day!"

"Sa-a-ay!" She closed the door. "Needn't nag, need I?" Her breath was quick and eyes angered. "I suppose you have got a full evening. Going to take a little drive, cutie? Going to drive over to Shoestring for the evening?"

"I haven't been in Shoestring in a month."

"You lie!"

"Don't you tell—"

"You lie!" she cried again, cutting him off. "You were over Wednesday night and tried to see this Richards broad and got a door slammed in your face! Now laugh that off, you big bum!"

She panted, tearing at the gloves in her hands.

"Well, what of it?" he demanded.

"I'll see what of it! I've been lied to and doublecrossed and strung along about long enough! I'm"—her voice dropped to a curiously controlled level— "I'm about done."

"Any time you're through, then, just say the word!"

She turned and went out, letting one broken, enraged sob escape her.

TO BE CONTINUED

A Story of the Australian Never-Never Land

CUMBLEGUBBIN'S MAGIC

By WYMAN SIDNEY SMITH

A SLY grin of satisfaction broke over the wrinkled black visage of old Cumblegubbin, the witch doctor, as the beat of galloping hoofs reached the little bark *humpey* down near the water hole. His keen ears identified the rider long before a white man's eyes could pierce the smoldering moonlight which hung dusty blue over the far reaches of the Australian never-never. Much magic had old Cumblegubbin concocted to "bring back young white fella belonga Cullumwarra boss fella papa"—years of magic making.

The hoof beats stopped. Larry Margate, alias Barclay Terrelton, drew up to open the gate of the big sheep station, but a moment later galloping hoofs sounded out again. At West Saxby, three hundred miles away, they had told him Newton Terrelton was dying, and since then he had been coming on like mad, leaving his car with a broken axle to leap on a horse for the last twenty-five miles. His

face burned from the day's sun; his lips cracked from the wind; his cheeks were gritty with the red dust of the bush.

As he swung through the shimmering night toward "government house" of Cullumwarra station, the shadowy forms of kangaroos pricked up curious ears and a mob of sheep shifted into the parched salt bush. From the Great Australian Bight far into Queensland, drought swept the continent, and Cullumwarra had not escaped. Branches of wattle trees were being broken down to feed the starving sheep and cattle, and ninety-five out of every hundred water dams—or tanks—were dry.

Barclay Terrelton did not need to be told these things. He had planned only to make Cullumwarra a stop on his escape into the never-never which edged its mystery so close to his father's holding. Murderer—perhaps they would call him that, yet it was strange they should when he had stood out for the same fair play that had once been the last straw in his father's stern appraisal.

A crooked game of "two-up" in a Sydney "school," a crooked "kip" and double faced coins—the same stunt he had used to win back his losses from the sheep shearers who had cheated him night after night in his father's shed. Back there in Sydney—he seemed to remember it like a vague dream—he had scarcely known he was speaking when he called the "spinner" and next moment two guns were ripping out flame and lead, and miraculously as always, Barclay Terrelton had walked leisurely away. He had tried to get killed before, in the war, and they had given him the Victoria Cross and the *Croix de Guerre* for bravery.

That also had been a long time ago, and before that he had returned from school to Cullumwarra where life had been rather irksome, especially with his brother Daggett sneering at him constantly about daily shaves, clean fingers, books. He had been proud then and a little vain perhaps of his sandy complexion, his sapphire blue eyes, his blond Saxon hair; and his temper was every jot as fierce as that of Newton Terrelton senior.

And then Bonnaberry had seemed to be the only one who understood him. Sixteen she was then, but mature as a woman, with deep brown eyes, lips the color of young eucalyptus leaves, cheeks that flushed and deepened to dimples when she smiled.

He knew her history from his mother, but he had never entirely believed it. Of her parents nothing was known. Flora Terrelton had bought the girl from a wandering tribe of blacks for some tobacco and ten guineas gold to save her from the horrors of a native initiation into womanhood; but she had doubted the girl, because in years of living with the blacks she had been deeply tanned. Her hair resembled theirs in its brownish burnished glints, her eyes were brown but different, and her nose was decidedly that of the Caucasian. But Flora Terrelton had died wondering how wise she had been in giving her two sons such an adopted sister. And Barclay went off to school thinking of Bonnaberry as only a jolly playfellow.

But on his return, his first quarrel with his father had been over Bonnaberry; and, refusing to be warned, he had walked with her through the perfumed trees, her lithe young body beside his, a low laughter echoing in her throat. And for that Newton Terrelton had swung a whip across his son's shoulders, raising welts, while he cried—

"She's got black blood in her, you young vagabond!"

"You lie," Barclay had shouted. "She's as white as you are."

He determined to leave of his own accord, and had played two-up with the sheep shearers to get money only to discover that they were cheating him. He was beating them with a game as crooked as their own when his father had come in and watched him.

"My son is a cheat," he had cried aloud, and there were more words.

"When I play with crooks, I play as they do." Barclay had stood up defiantly.

"When you play, you play square or not at all," the elder had cried, growing livid with wrath over what he considered the second insult to the honorable blood of the Terreltons. "And if you don't, you can leave now," he had added.

"If I go, you'll never see me again," Barclay had replied. "And I'll take you on that."

He strode out of the place and went to his room to pack a few belongings in a bag. And then Tinty, one of the native girls from the village, had come tumbling into his window.

"You come with me," she begged. "You marry me. I like you. You like me."

Barclay had flung her aside just as his father came to the door to conciliate him for his own hasty words, but he heard what Tinty said. When Barclay stepped out, the older Terrelton merely placed some banknotes in his hand—that was the parting of father and son. Bonnaberry was sitting in the living room, and he had hesitated before her.

"Goodby," she said simply. That had been five years ago.

THE HORSE sweating beneath him seemed to have become part of him as he went through the night. He saw the lighted windows of government house and wondered what his homecoming would be like. The sting seemed to have gone out of those wounds which had once cut so deeply. He possessed only one longing—to see his gruff, tousel haired parent just once more. He could not believe that Newton Terrelton would be dying. In West Saxby the hotel keeper had told him about the old station owner being found after a two days' search in the bottom of a deserted mine shaft. So far he had been unconscious, but he was making a fight.

"'E'd die if that runaway son o' his would come home," said the man. "But Newt Terrelton cared more fer that good-for-nothing kid than fer anybody else in the world, I guess."

The last quarter mile—and then Barclay burst into the room to see his father's pallid face framed with gray hair on the white pillow. He did not see Bonnaberry sitting at the bedside, Daggett standing beyond, Dr. Wilmiston feeling the slowly ebbing pulse.

"Guv'nor," he cried hoarsely, and Newton Terrelton opened his eyes at the sound of his son's voice.

"Bark—my boy," he whispered.

Barclay knelt at the bedside, kissing the old hands. They were flesh and blood alike, these two. That is why they could hate each other so unforgivingly and so long.

Dr. Wilmiston smiled. There might be hope now.

But Terrelton's lips moved feebly as his eyes turned toward the doctor.

"My will," he whispered. "In the desk."

Had any one been watching, they might have seen a smile linger on the face of Daggett Terrelton as he observed this reunion between his father and brother. His gray eyes did not flinch; he let them rest a moment on Bonnaberry, and then back to the doctor who held the will in his hand.

"Burn it," said Newton Terrelton. "Cullumwarra belongs to both my sons."

Already his eyes were growing glassy, and he closed them even as the old practitioner tossed the will on the glowing logs in the fireplace. Then Newton Terrelton lay quiet.

Bonnaberry sobbed brokenly. And unashamed of his tears, Barclay cried over the hands which were growing colder. At last he reached out a hand to Bonnaberry, then another to Daggett.

It occurred to Barclay that he was now free to continue his trek into the never-never. He wanted nothing on Cullumwarra—yet he could not leave so.

It was Bonnaberry who struck out all thoughts of departure from his mind by her low moan:

"He was murdered. I know he was murdered."

And Daggett said—

"He quarreled with the sheep shearers

last year and we think they clubbed him over the head and then threw him into the hole."

Tears coursed down Bonnaberry's cheeks—she had grown into a glorious woman.

"How did you happen to be on the way?" Daggett asked.

"It doesn't matter," said Bonnaberry quickly as she saw Barclay hesitate. "He's here now and we've needed him before."

"I simply wanted to see father again," Barclay nodded.

But later, when he followed the casket to the cemetery, his mind suddenly returned to Daggett's question and he wondered if his brother had guessed, or was suspicious, or whether the news of the gunplay in Sydney had somehow preceded him. But who would identify Larry Margate as Barclay Terrelton, for it was Larry who had fought with the Anzac forces, Larry who had roamed about afterward always with money in his pocket, always pursued by women whom he did not like.

With the funeral over, Cullumwarra went to work again to save its twenty-five thousand sheep. They were dying now by the dozen while one artesian bore was dry and the other slacking off—and only two tanks left. Barclay rode out to them and saw how little water there was in the flat muddy ponds which reflected the high mud dam flung across a clay pan in a watercourse to hold the rainy season run-off.

An eery loneliness possessed him. He wanted to avenge his father's death, but he could make out nothing from the tracks around the old mine shaft which had been left by early *fossickers* who had explored all that country in a vain search for gold. His father might have bent over the hole trying to see if there was any water in the bottom, lost his balance and tumbled in.

"Jim Neilson, the police trooper, is coming out to see if he can find any trace of the murderer with his black trackers," Daggett announced next morning after breakfast.

Barclay paled. Every police trooper in the Commonwealth would have his picture by this time.

"Are you riding the boundary today?" he asked of Daggett.

"Yes, but I'm taking my camel," Daggett replied. "Old Opal can make the fifty miles in good shape and it's a pretty long haul for a towney."

"I think I could stand it on a horse, even though I am stiff from that last ride. I haven't ridden for a couple of years."

"No." Daggett appeared to settle the question. "You stay here and meet Neilson. He may want to ask some questions."

"All right," Barclay replied as he looked into the hard gray eyes.

Daggett went to get his camel, and Barclay saw him taking off through the bush. The breeze brought the reek of the beast back to him.

Bonnaberry came out of the tin roofed shanty where Daggett and Hawkins, the foreman, had an office.

"Where's Hawkins?" he asked her.

"Off with the crew of blacks pulling down branches," she answered, still avoiding his gaze as she had been doing.

Barclay wanted to question her, to find out about this strangely aloof girl who stood before him.

"You've changed," he said.

The dimple showed in her cheek.

"I couldn't help it very well." She smiled wanly.

"I hope you don't remember all of the bad things," he continued.

"I never thought you were wrong in anything." She spoke softly. "You both acted like children."

"And Tinty?"

"She told me the truth. Cumblegubbin sent her."

"Cumblegubbin? Is he still alive? And you told Father about Tinty?"

"I made Tinty tell him. Yes, Cumblegubbin is still at the water hole."

"I'm going to find him," he announced. "That black devil may tell us what we want to know."

But Bonnaberry stopped him.

"Wait," she asked, "I must tell you. I know you won't feel badly, that it won't make any difference to you—but I'm going to marry Steve when the shearing season is over."

Barclay gasped.

"You—you're going to marry Hawkins?" he stammered. "Oh—I see."

"I'd have told you sooner," she explained. "But these last days have made us all half crazy. The wind, the drought, the dust, and then father, and then you came back—"

"Like a ghost," he finished for her.

"We thought you'd been killed at Gallipoli—all but Father," she ended weakly.

A pink and gray-white *galah* cockatoo came strutting bravely around the corner of the house to interrupt them with a cooing note of inquiry. It cocked one eye at the telephone wire above.

Bonnaberry welcomed the bird as something to change the conversation.

"Oh, Tricky," she cried. "You rascal. You want to get up there and swing on the telephone wire, don't you?"

She picked up the plodding bird and stroked his crest.

"He flies up and swings on the wire with his beak." She smiled again at Barclay. "And his beak is so strong he cuts the wire in two. I have to keep his wings clipped."

Barclay was silent.

"Don't I, Tricky?" Bonnaberry talked on. "If you cut the wire again, Daggett says he'll wring your neck."

"Daggett?" asked Barclay.

"Daggett is odd," Bonnaberry hastened to say. "I think the worry of this station is getting on his nerves. He hasn't been farther away than West Saxby for years; just stays on here. And the monotony is terrifying sometimes, so that I'm always glad when the sheep shearers come. Then we have almost as much excitement as the blacks do over a *corroboree*."

"He hasn't had to stay, has he?" Bark asked.

"Oh, he's gone away," she replied. "He goes off into the bush on long hunting trips to study the blacks. He says he's going to live with them some day."

Barclay thought that he would be doing the same before very long, and with a slight excuse went off to saddle his horse for a ride to Cumblegubbin's *humpey*.

"Coo—oo—oo—ee'," Bonnaberry called after him as he rode off, and he turned to answer that whistling, birdlike call of the Australian settlers to each other. It is a friendly call, and he felt more at home than he ever had before. He paused at the first gum tree to pull down some leaves, crush them in his hands and smell the spicy pungent odor.

BARCLAY rode on toward Cumblegubbin's *humpey*. The old witch doctor had been living on the station for years; he had come a few weeks after Bonnaberry had been purchased, and since then his reputation among the surrounding blacks increased momentously. In spite of all Bonnaberry did to improve the living conditions of the natives in their little cluster of tin houses, it was Cumblegubbin who ruled the blacks with fear of his magic. When they heard the sound of his bull roarer in the night, they trembled.

Tinty, his daughter, found employment at Cullumwarra, helping Bonnaberry. Bark had noticed her about the house. Cumblegubbin himself did not work, except to make boomerangs, spears, *woomerahs* or spear throwers, and these stone cut weapons he traded to surrounding settlers for tobacco. If he ran short of food or tobacco, once in awhile the proud old black would ask for some, and he was never refused anything on Cullumwarra.

Right now he wanted very much to see "young white fella come back," but if his magic had brought him home, it would also bring him to the *humpey*.

Cumblegubbin noticed the rider approaching through the scrub, and his fingers reached down to touch the bundle of string which enclosed his fetish and his secret. Then he returned to his work on a piece of acacia wood as Barclay rode

up, straight bronze-black hair tumbling over his eyes as he squatted on the ground.

Barclay stood before him, his clean limbed powerful figure making the black appear almost a dwarf.

"Come back pretty quick," said Cumblegubbin. "Think maybe young boss fella close up finis. That old fella wait longa time, my word."

Sympathy and understanding were not absent in the meaning of those pidgin words, yet the death of an old man is accepted as being quite natural by the blacks. To their way of thinking, Newton Terrelton had been very, very old.

Barclay wanted to ask some very direct questions, but he knew that abruptness would shut the black's mouth like a clam.

"Why you send Tinty longa my place one time?" he demanded.

Cumblegubbin grinned.

"Tinty b-i-g fool," he replied. "This fella not send Tinty alonga you. She come get medicine for make love. Go wrong place. She look for white pinkerninny. My word, come close up finis. Now she got plenty pinkerninny."

He held up three fingers.

"You old devil," Barclay muttered.

Cumblegubbin was delighted and forgot himself.

"Tinty have plenty white pinkerninny now," he announced.

"What?" gasped Barclay. "Whose are they?"

Cumblegubbin saw immediately that he now possessed more valuable information and so he merely answered.

"Belonga some fella white man maybe."

Barclay studied him. Trying to pry information out of a black when he did not want to tell was like lifting a mountain with a crowbar.

Cumblegubbin made another surmise.

"You come back now marry young white fella girl Bonnaberry?" he suggested.

"Shut up, you old villain," Bark shouted as he raised his hand ready to strike. Cumblegubbin dodged and then they both laughed. "You better watch out close," the black added. "Some white fella make you finis."

That was a threat. There was no telling how much Cumblegubbin knew. Barclay took a package of tobacco from his pocket and handed it to Cumblegubbin.

"Who kill white boss fella Cullumwarra?" he asked quietly.

"Place belonga big hole," the witch doctor rejoined. "Boss fella ride up, get off horse. Come very dark night. Boss fella ride long time. He very tired. He get off look in holes. Try find water. Other fella come close up. Have bags on feet so leave no track. Give bump. Push old boss fella in hole. Nobody see maybe. Black fella see. He run off quick, my word. He very much scare. Big *bunyip* chase him belonga man wear bags on feet. Black fella no talk. Come close up finis maybe."

So that was it! Some one had followed Newton Terrelton through the night, crept up behind him and killed him. The blacks would not talk because they feared that mysterious creature called the *bunyip* which could make itself as big as a house or as small as a worm. There were a number of old mine shafts on the station—they should have been covered up, but they had been left open. Some of them were seventy feet deep, and his father had been right in thinking that he might find water. What had he used to look into the holes—a flashlight perhaps. Then where was it?

"You watch out," Cumblegubbin went on. "You come close up finis maybe. Some white fella not like you very much."

Barclay leaped into the saddle and rode away. He examined the ground all around the fatal old shaft and found no more than he had the first time. He made a rude torch and dropped it into the hole. The nickel plated flashlight lay on the bottom.

But Bark Terrelton did not linger. Far away on the reddish hills he could see nothing but the whirling willy-willies, or dust cyclones. Cullumwarra was the last out-station, and a murderer could

hide in the out-back for weeks if he lived with the blacks or knew the country well enough to get water. A mob of sheep moved down into a dry watercourse, and Barclay observed them. In a patch of scrub he saw Hawkins with his gang of blacks hooking down branches. He rode up to talk with Hawkins, and that short, heavy set individual greeted him casually.

"Been talkin' to Cumblegubbin?" Hawkins asked as Bark handed him tobacco and cigaret papers.

"Right," said Bark. "Who's the father of Tinty's halfcaste children?"

Hawkins went on rolling his cigaret.

"Don't believe nothing that old liar tells you," he said. "Has she got some halfcaste brats?"

"I don't know," Bark ended the discussion. "Need any help here?"

"Doing right well now," Hawkins replied. "Wish it'd rain. This yere drought gets on my nerves."

"Yeh," Bark agreed. "I'll be riding on, I guess."

HE HAD no destination, but he proposed to keep out of the way of Jim Neilson the police trooper as long as possible. He spent all day in the bush. Emus and kangaroos eyed him curiously as he passed, but he did not turn back until the sun set like a fire opal in the clear sky and a faint coolness swept over the hills.

"Did you see Neilson?" Daggett asked as soon as Barclay entered the living room at one end of which Bonnaberry had set the table with a red and white checkered cloth.

"He was out talkin' to Cumblegubbin," Hawkins announced as he turned the pages of an old magazine.

"I decided not to wait for Neilson," Barclay replied. "I did see Cumblegubbin, and then went on to the *fossicker* holes."

"Neilson was here at noon," Bonnaberry said. "He had two black trackers with him, and he said he'd be back later on."

Daggett coughed.

"I told father he shouldn't have quarrelled with Sydney Jake and his gang. All we can do now is get another bunch of shearers. And I don't expect Neilson or anybody else will ever find the murderer."

"It's worth trying however," Barclay remarked dryly. "Cumblegubbin says a black saw the man push father into the hole. It was night and so he couldn't see who it was."

Daggett laughed.

"Hell, you don't believe anything that old liar tells you," he said. "He's crazy. All he's done in ten years is to chew sting leaves and carve out boomerangs."

The two brothers surveyed each other. There was no love in the eyes of either.

"Who's the father of Tinty's three halfcastes?" Barclay asked when Bonnaberry left the room, but she had returned quickly so that he did not notice her until she answered him.

"Steve says he's seen her with one of the sheep shearers," Bonnaberry replied. "Come on," she invited. "Everything's ready." Barclay could see that the girl was trying to make them all as happy as possible.

From out in the bush came the booming drum of an emu. It was a queer whirring note.

"That's a sign of rain, isn't it?" Bark asked, anxious to break the silence at the table.

"We've heard it lots of times lately, but it hasn't rained yet," Bonnaberry answered as she passed the mutton chops to Steve and Daggett.

Barclay saw her eyes meet the overseer's, but he failed to find any bright lights in hers.

They were leaving the table when another sound came to them, a dull, ominous, whirring roar.

"Old Cumblegubbin with his bull roarer again," Daggett declared. "I'll drive that old devil off the place."

Barclay thought of the *galah* that Daggett would like to kill, and his lips tightened.

"Anything else you'd like to drive off the station?" he asked pointedly.

Daggett smirked.

"I suppose that's some more of your towney sarcasm," he jeered.

"Well, leave Cumblegubbin alone!" Barclay said.

"Oh, I won't hurt him." Daggett laughed. "He's getting too bold lately, that's all, and needs to be put in his place."

"No one would ever take you for brothers, the way you snarl at each other," Bonnaberry spoke quietly in reproof.

Daggett glowered at her.

"You're as bad as the old man. Always nagging and preaching."

"I'll move along any time," Barclay offered. "Nothing much to keep me here if I can't be of any help with the sheep."

"No," Bonnaberry said quickly. "We need you here. Besides, it's your place too."

"How much will you take for your share?" Daggett asked as though he had been waiting for this subject to come up for some time.

"I don't care to sell, old topper," Barclay replied easily. "No use now. Plenty of time later."

The growl of the bull roarer sounded again, this time as though it were approaching the stone walled house which lay among the pepper trees in the moonlight.

Daggett left at once without a further word. Barclay heard the sound of his horse's hoofs, and then the bull roarer stopped. Bonnaberry and Hawkins were sitting before the fireplace reading. They seemed unenthusiastic about their approaching marriage.

Barclay waited for them to leave, for the moonlight was beautiful outside. But they went on reading.

"When did father make his last will—the one he burned?" he asked them after he had smoked silently for a time.

Hawkins peered at him over the top of a magazine. Hawkins had small, fishy eyes, the only doubtful attribute of a countenance which was otherwise the orderly and careful overseer. In his sandy hair a few streaks of gray showed, yet Hawkins had grown up on the station with the two brothers and Barclay had always looked upon him as something of a friend.

But Bonnaberry again answered.

"About two months ago," she replied. "He and Daggett drove to West Saxby one day and father drew it up then."

"Is there any other will?" Barclay asked.

"No, and this one wasn't registered—only witnessed," Bonnaberry noted. "Daggett said father was foolish not to register it, but father had his way as always."

The faint odor of the casuarina logs drifted out into the room like incense.

"Nothing ever heard of your parents?" he asked the girl.

She shook her head.

"Cumblegubbin pretends to know, but he says he won't tell."

"Odd, not even a piece of jewelry was found. The blacks would have kept that."

"What difference does it make?" Bonnaberry bent over her book. "I don't care any more, and neither does Steve." Her slim hand went out to touch Hawkins on the elbow. "Do you Steve?" she asked.

"Nope," he said with his pipe in his mouth. "You're the height of my dreams."

Barclay left them then, for he had plenty of information now. He did not believe that Bonnaberry intended to marry the overseer, but there could be no object in his own intentions or hopes, because any moment he might be driven into the wilderness as a fugitive from justice.

"Old boy," he said to himself, "you don't get a welcome reception around here for some reason. But just yet, you aren't leaving. Too bad I turned up. That scurvy brother of mine would have had the station now. And it's not altogether impossible he didn't help things along—maybe Hawkins had something to do with it."

The wind swept by the eaves, whipping the tin roof overhead. The drumming of the emu had stopped, but now the *mopoke* called it's *oo-oom-oom!* Not since his arrival at Cullumwarra had he heard the raucous outlandish laughing of that jolly bird fool, the *kookoburra*, who bursts forth into a loud *ho-ho-ho—wha-haw-whah* as if at the foibles of humanity. The *kookoburra* laughs when no one else feels like it.

Barclay went to bed but he could not sleep. Daggett's room was next to his, but a heavy stone partition separated them. Daggett did not return until after midnight, and some time later Barclay must have fallen asleep.

TWO DAYS passed with the wind still rolling up dust and no sign of rain, yet Bark seemed to be finding a place in the family. He had talked to Tinty, but she pretended to be dumb. In the morning he rode out with Hawkins to a new patch of scrub which he had suggested pruning down for the sheep.

The two men were riding along at an easy gait when Hawkins pulled up suddenly and leaped to the ground.

"Look yere," he cried. "Look yere. I knew them blacks was up to mischief."

He stooped over to pick up a long string stretched across the trail that Barclay's horse had left the day before.

"That's your trail ain't it?" Hawkins asked.

Bark nodded and examined the two teeth at one end of the string, the lump of resin at the other.

"Doesn't mean anything to me," he said.

"Ow," Hawkins exclaimed. "It's a *tchintu*, one o' them death tricks the damn' blacks use. The old witch doctor sings it, draws the heat outer the sun inter it, and then puts it across some one's track they wants ter get rid of. An' the heat comes out, follows 'im up an' kills 'im. It's worse than takin' the kidney fat."

Bark laughed.

"Lord, Hawkins, an old-timer in the bush doesn't believe that superstition."

"I'm gettin' the jams lately," Hawkins remarked. "These blacks can do murder so's it don't look like murder."

"Who wants to murder you?" Bark asked.

"It ain't me I'm thinkin' of. It's you," Hawkins answered.

Bark laughed again.

"Give the thing to me." He wound it up and slipped it carelessly into his pocket along with his tobacco pouch and his pipe.

"Don't tell Bonnaberry we found it," Hawkins went on. "She'd worry."

They rode up to where the blacks were hooking down branches. Hawkins' bronze face was a little paler; his eyes shifted about constantly as though he were trying to discover which one of the natives might be guilty. Then he fumbled through his pockets for his tobacco and as usual found none. Hawkins never remembered to carry tobacco with him.

"Want some tobacco?" Bark asked him.

"I would," Hawkins came nearer. "Forgot everything this mornin'."

"Here, you can use my pipe too," Bark offered and pulled out the tobacco pouch, pipe and matches.

As he did so the *tchintu* dropped unnoticed from his rear pocket and lay on the ground at his heels. One of the natives saw it and shifted away uneasily while his eye roved back constantly to watch the death medicine.

"Pipe's a little dusty," Bark said as he handed it over. "Haven't used it today. I left it on the window last night."

"It's all right," Hawkins replied as he stuffed the tobacco into the bowl, put the stem between his teeth and sheltered a match. "She draws fine."

A few minutes later all those centuries of black superstition were justified in the eyes of the blacks. Hawkins had walked off to take up a hook, and then put it down to lean dizzily against a tree. Barclay heard the cry of the natives, and when he turned around Hawkins lay on the

ground. He shouted at the blacks to help him, but the word on the lips of one *tchintu*, sent them fleeing from the scene of death as though pursued by demons.

Bark bent over the prostrate overseer, shook him, looked around helplessly. The eyes were already glazing, but he carried him to his horse and held Hawkins in his arms while he rode like wild toward the house.

Hawkins was dead when Bark lifted him down and carried him inside. Bonnaberry's eyes stood wide open. She brought a whisky bottle and tried to press it between the dead man's lips.

"What happened?" She moaned and began to sob.

Barclay told her what had happened and left her with Hawkins while he called Dr. Wilmiston. Wilmiston was fortunately only thirty miles away and arrived a few hours later. He shook his head after a brief examination. His bright eyes were dim and his white hair still neatly parted when he looked up.

"Steve always had a bad heart. He's been in to see me a couple of times lately and I warned him against overexertion or excitement."

The pioneer practitioner listened to Barclay's story of the *tchintu*.

"Have you got the pipe?" asked Wilmiston at last.

"No. It was my pipe but I forgot to bring it."

"Oh, well, if it was your pipe, that's different," Wilmiston finished. "Some native might have had a grudge against Hawkins and put some poison in the bowl."

Daggett came in to hear this part of the conversation. Bonnaberry cried softly to herself.

"I'll go over and get the pipe," Daggett offered. "Things are beginning to look funny around here."

"I'll have it analyzed if you bring it to me, or you can give it to Neilson," the doctor answered as he gathered up his kit. He lingered at the gate to talk privately with Barclay for a while. "There's no doubt about your father's being set upon in some way," he spoke. "This looks like some more of the same. Have you ever thought of suspecting that old Cumblegubbin? Hawkins used your pipe and if it had poison in it, that poison was meant for you."

Barclay started as the true meaning of the event now became apparent.

"I don't think it's Cumblegubbin," he said. "I think that old black likes me."

"Well, you can't know for sure. I'd be careful if I were you. We Caucasians have a superstition, you know, that death strikes three times in the same place."

BARCLAY watched him ride out of the yard and turn back toward the station.

"Three times, eh?" he muttered. "And that poison, if it was poison, was meant for me. Well—that makes a clear case in one way. With father and me out of the way, the station would belong to just one person."

He heard sobs from a little shack down toward the stables. He went in to see who it was.

"Tinty," he spoke to the black *gin*, "what are you doing here?"

"He my man," she said. "He gives me money go way with pinkerninnies longa time. He marry white girl. Not see this fella Tinty anymore."

"You belonga him? You his *lubra*? That fella Hawkins?" Bark asked. The *gin* shook her head in assent.

Bark looked at her. And Hawkins had intended to marry Bonnaberry. Somehow, he felt fearfully weary as he left Tinty wailing dumbly to herself.

He stopped. Bonnaberry was leaning against the corner of the galvanized iron shed. Her eyes met his and he saw the tears starting. She had heard everything. He knew without asking her as he saw a brave wan smile come to her lips.

"Even a husband is denied me," she said.

She caught back her self-possession

abruptly and went off looking for the *galah*. Tricky the bird was sitting on a box, one eye on Bonnaberry, the other on the telephone wire which seemed to fascinate it as nothing else in the world—it was a toy which the bird was denied and it appeared to know that the wire was therefore tremendously worthwhile.

Bonnaberry reached out her hands for Tricky, but with a wild lurch the cockatoo eluded her and beat his wings madly to reach a perch on the slender wire. He caught it with his beak and then with sheer joy swung back and forth.

"Help me," she called, even as Bark ran up with a short pole. "He's my last friend in the world now."

"Not your last, Bonnaberry," Barclay told her as he tried to dislodge the pesky bird.

Tricky came down to earth with a thump, but his powerful beak had left bright marks on the wire.

"Cumblegubbin gave him to me," Bonnaberry said. "He found him out in the bush and made me promise to take care of Tricky until he died."

Barclay nodded.

"Old Cumblegubbin is no fool. In fact, I think he knows more than any of us right now."

"Tricky is a totem bird." Bonnaberry was putting her finger under the cockatoo's bill. "He's *kobong* and sacred to a certain totem tribe, so none of that totem will hurt him."

She cuddled the bird in her arm and went back to the kitchen.

Only two of them sat at the table for the evening meal. The light filtered down on to the cloth through a silk drape.

Neither of them more than tasted the food, and a heavy silence surrounded the house. The lights and shadows from the hearth flickered on the stone walls and on the open rafters overhead. It was a room which might have been used by a feudal lord, and its size made the man and the woman seem small and helpless.

"Where's Daggett?" Bark asked.

"Oh, he does this quite often," Bonnaberry told him. "I think he rode down to get the newspapers today, too."

"Newspapers?"

"Yes. We don't get them very often. We take the Sydney papers."

Then she leaned toward him abruptly.

"You know," she said, "I'm half afraid of Daggett. That's why I wanted you to stay. He knows everything that the blacks do, and I think they're afraid of him—all except Cumblegubbin. I think Daggett has witnessed those terrible initiation ceremonies they have for young boys and girls when they receive them into the tribe as men and women. And I don't think a half dozen white men in the world have ever seen a full ceremony. I think it's getting on his mind, so that he sometimes thinks like a native."

"Daggett and I tried to crawl up on the sound of the bull roarers once, and the sentinels almost speared us," Bark said; he was nonchalant about it.

"You never told me," she said.

"There are plenty of things I've never told you."

"Better not, then," she warned. "Some things shouldn't be said or they get into our minds and spoil our happiness. I wish—"

He glanced at her as he rolled a cigaret.

"I'm sorry you heard Tinty," he said, guessing her implication. "I didn't know you were there."

"You don't think that she did something to him, to Steve, do you?"

"I think there is only one person who can answer our questions, and I'm going to get him."

"Who? Cumblegubbin?"

"Yes. And I'll get him now."

Bonnaberry shook her head.

"Don't go outside," she entreated. "I feel as though something were going to happen. I don't think it's safe."

Before Barclay could speak again, the whir of a bull roarer burst out of the night. Then another bull roarer took up its whir, and the two sounds grew louder as though they were coming toward the house, almost as though they were trying to fight each other.

Bark sprang to the door and ran out. Tinty ran past him to get inside. He stopped, not knowing what to do, and then ran forward into the milky blue shadows of the scrubby trees.

It was a queer sight that he discovered then. Backing through the trees, with his bull roarer spinning like a propeller was the old black witch doctor, and walking steadily toward him as though in an attempt to induce some hypnotic trance was Daggett, but not the everyday Daggett—he was naked except for a loincloth and his body was stuck with red and black and white down. His hair also was covered with down, like a great powder puff.

His eyes spied Barclay standing beside a tree and he snapped a command to a crowd of a dozen blacks who followed him with spears and shields, all of them naked and decorated with the down. Two of them darted out toward Barclay and he turned to run. He had not brought a gun along. The race was short and swift. The blacks caught up with him but did not touch him as he dashed through the door and faced them from the other side of the room. They stepped aside while old Cumblegubbin dropped his *churinga* and backed up until he stood beside him. Barclay noticed the black's bull roarer, a molded slab of wood dusted with red and yellow ocher and attached to a string.

Daggett strode in, stopped.

"Get over there," he ordered Bonnaberry. Then he spied Tinty crouched under the table. "You black devil!" he snarled. "If you've told them, I'll kill you. I'll have you hung for murdering Hawkins."

"I not hurt white fella," Tinty chattered as she crept across the floor.

Daggett and his bedowned followers looked like so many half picked birds in the dim light.

"Look here, Daggett, what's the idea of all this?" Barclay demanded as the others stood motionless.

Daggett laughed.

"You—murderer," he jeered. "You thought I wouldn't find out how you happened to come here, didn't you?" He took a clipping of newspaper from his pocket. "Read it," he said. "Larry Margate—you're the man that fits the description to a dot, and you're wanted for murder."

But Barclay Terrelton was not beaten yet—he had killed the man, but the other had reached for his gun first. He had fled—

"And who murdered my father?" Bark demanded. "Who put the poison in my pipe?"

The down covered visages back of Daggett were motionless. "I'll call Jim Neilson and let him find out," Daggett rejoined. "Maybe he'll find out that you did all of it."

"You lie, Daggett," Bonnaberry spoke.

"Let him," said Barclay. "I did kill a man in Sydney, but I think Cumblegubbin here can tell some things about the murder of my father that won't sound too good."

Daggett smirked again and went to the telephone.

"Daggett, you can't do that," Bonnaberry cried, and flung herself at him.

But Daggett struck out his arm and sent her reeling back so that she fell to the floor.

"Shut up, you black *lubra*," he shouted. "I'm doing this from now on."

Then he added as he fumbled with the telephone:

"And he can't escape to the never-never either, because I've got my blacks here to prevent that. All my life he's interfered. He's been the pet, the spoiled child, and has gotten what he wanted while I've worked and slaved without thanks."

The voice was bitter. No sound came from the telephone and Daggett's eyes roamed wildly about the room.

"That damned *galah* of yours," he raged.

He saw the bird sitting on the window half asleep, reached for a gun in his holster and then without taking it out, he seized the cockatoo and twisted its neck.

OLD Cumblegubbin, silent all this time and waiting, now burst forth into peal after peal of cackling laughter. The bewitched Daggett leaped toward him, but Barclay stepped in the way and shot out his fist with a thud to Daggett's jaw. Before he could land another he was down in a heap on the floor with the downy blacks on top of him. They pinioned him, lifted him to his feet, and four of them held him while another rested a spear point against his breast.

Cumblegubbin chattered on.

"White fella witch doctor kill black fella totem bird," he gurgled. "White fella kill *kobong*. All *kobong* kill white fella come close up finis."

Then in native dialect he spoke to the blacks. Daggett backed off, and Cumblegubbin reached out a crooked finger to point at the white man.

"White fella all same dead now," he mumbled.

Four blacks stood in the door, the hold on Bark's arms relaxed. They had another victim now. The room had grown silent as a cave. Daggett's fingers crept slowly toward his gun, but he knew that a native spear would get him before he could shoot three times. He picked up his bull roarer, and Cumblegubbin grew sober.

Into the silence then came a stern calm voice—

"What's going on here?" Police Trooper Jim Neilson asked as he brushed the blacks aside at the doorway and came forward with his hand resting on the butt of his gun.

His eyes sped around the room—the wrinkled face of the old witch doctor, Bonnaberry, Tinty, Daggett and the downy blacks; and his glance lingered on the face of Barclay Terrelton.

"You didn't seem very anxious to see me the last time I was here," he said. "Dr. Wilmiston got me this afternoon and so I thought I'd come without telling you."

Daggett was the first to speak.

"There's your man," he said harshly. "Larry Margate is my brother over there, wanted for murder in Sydney. Cumblegubbin gave Tinty the poison to kill Hawkins this morning, and there they are. I've been taking in criminals today."

Neilson observed him.

"Saying quite a bit," he replied as he took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and gave them to Daggett. He did not miss the strain which appeared on the face of the white witch doctor, but no one else could see it.

"I'll take your brother," he said.

Barclay held out his wrists, the steel clicked, and Daggett led him over to the door. Neilson was keeping his eye on the others, and next instant Daggett's bull roarer cracked down on his skull. Bark dodged as Daggett made a vicious lunge at him, and without stopping Daggett fled into the night. The blacks rushed through the door after him.

"Stop them, they'll kill him," Bonnaberry cried as she tried to hold them back. Barclay fought through after them.

He caught Cumblegubbin by the neck and threw him to the ground. From the camel shed Daggett's gun was spitting flame and lead. Spears sailed through the moonlight. Two blacks went down. Barclay felt a bullet graze his arm and knew that his brother was shooting at him as well as at the blacks. But he went on. The camel dived out then as the natives held back, with two of their number lying still and quiet.

The great lumbering beast got under way. Barclay turned just in time to see Cumblegubbin come dashing up with a heavy boomerang poised for a throw. Again he beat the old black down and the shadowy camel lumbered away into the night with not a sound coming from its cushioned feet.

Cumblegubbin picked himself up grumbling.

"He very bad fella. Why you not let me kill?" he muttered.

Barclay said nothing—perhaps it would have been as well.

"He put *tchintu* on trail so you die quick," the black went on.

Barclay hurried back to the house when Tinty and Bonnaberry were bending over Neilson. Bonnaberry looked up and came quickly to Barclay.

"Did he—did he—"

"Yes," Barclay answered evenly. "But only a scratch."

Two blacks were dead; another had a flesh wound. Bonnaberry tended Bark's arm, and the black's, and told Tinty to go. Neilson was sitting up after a drink of whisky.

"Where'd he go?" he asked as he looked at the two.

"I'm here," Bark answered.

Neilson smiled.

"Yes," he said. "You're a Terrelton all right. I had a notice about you, but the next day the case was dismissed. All of the witnesses said you shot in self-defense and, when they looked up your Anzac record, they called it off. I didn't know you were here until tonight, and then I couldn't place your face until Daggett talked."

He paused and reached for the keys to the handcuffs. He unlocked them as he continued speaking.

"I didn't come for you. I wanted Daggett for the murder of his father. With what I learned from Cumblegubbin and what my black trackers got from a couple of the natives, we had enough evidence to arrest him. One of my trackers even traced him to his camel, and the camel came back here. And you're the sort that would help a murderer escape because he's your brother."

Barclay met his eyes.

"That's what my father would have done," he said proudly.

"Hm," the trooper answered. "That's what I thought, and that's why I wanted you tied up. I thought I could handle the blacks if you were helpless—but he cracked me over the head. He must have guessed what I was going to do."

"Call off the hunt," Barclay spoke firmly.

"My business is to catch criminals," Neilson replied in the same level tones, "but I can't chase him tonight. He took the camel, I suppose, and he can do a hundred miles a day with that brute. No horse ever born can follow, and he knows the country."

Bonnaberry had gone to the couch and thrown herself upon it, sobbing.

The trooper was getting up, preparing to leave.

"Dr. Wilmiston said that he'd wait for me before he reported Hawkins. We'll never find the pipe now, and as there doesn't seem to be any doubt about who the poison was for, that crime also is chalked up against Daggett Terrelton."

Barclay followed him to the door, held out his hand and the other took it in a firm grasp.

"Thank you," he said.

"Don't thank me, Neilson replied. "I've been eavesdropping on you for the last three hours. I was outside when the fight started. We'll be glad to see you manager of Cullumwarra. As for Daggett—we'll take him if he ever shows up in civilization. But the blacks will chase him with signals and message sticks."

He shifted his holster into place and rode away.

Cumblegubbin stood by and then turned to Barclay with a grin.

"That fella Daggett very big fool," he wagged. "That *galah* not *kobong* belonga his boys. I fool that fella plenty. He make me mad."

And summoning all the dignity of his five feet four inches, the old witch doctor walked away.

Inside Bonnaberry raised her head from the couch when Bark entered,

"You'll stay now," she said.

Her eyes swept over him.

But old Cumblegubbin had not completed his affairs. He now stood in the doorway watching them and Bark turned when he saw Bonnaberry's eyes shift past him.

"This fella marry white fella girl plenty soon now," the black fellow observed. "Young boss fella make promise."

In spite of themselves Bark and Bonnaberry smiled at Cumblegubbin's wistfulness. Bark looked at the woman be-

side him, put his arm around her shoulder.

Cumblegubbin's satisfaction was evident.

"He's right," Bonnaberry whispered softly. "We were always in love, weren't we?"

"White girl can have dilly bag," the witch doctor went on. "Rain come plenty soon now."

He held out the netting of bag which contained odds and ends the old fellow had collected.

Bonnaberry took the dilly bag and even as she did so the first drops of rain splattered on the roof. She opened the bag, emptied its contents on the table and filled the bag with packages of tobacco. Barclay brought out two new pipes and gave them to Cumblegubbin.

Still Cumblegubbin hesitated.

"Black fella plenty smart," he declared. "Make big magic. Save white fella pinkerninny, bring back young white fella, drive off that fella Daggett. Plenty rain come soon."

"What about the white piccaninny?" Bonnaberry asked breathlessly.

But Cumblegubbin only took the tobacco and stored the pipes away as though he were very busy.

"Black fella go back see home alonga ribber. Finis come bimeby. *Mung-um* far go. This fella have plenty 'baccy. Make plenty smoke. Find white pinkerninny over there." He pointed to the table and shuffled away, sheltering his precious tobacco from the sheets of rain.

Bonnaberry pounced upon the bundles of string and pieces of stone on the table. Barclay picked up a string wrapped mess and started to unwind the cords. But Bonnaberry found a larger one.

"Here's his fetish," she exclaimed.

Then their eyes caught the sheen of gold as the rough crude string was unwound, and a moment later Bonnaberry held a small locket in her fingers.

"Open it," she cried. Barclay took it from her trembling hand and spread it open with a quick twist.

"It's me—my father and mother." She began to sob. For inside were the pictures of a dark, lean faced man and an oval faced, deep eyed woman with a baby girl in her arms.

"I always knew it," he said simply, as his arms went out to her.

Rain rattled and thumped on the roof overhead. Out in the bush somewhere the mobs of sheep were putting out pink tongues to taste the water. In a week the great Australian never-never would be green as a garden, grasses would spring up like magic, the salt bush and the blue bush would put out tender sprouts, the tobacco bushes would be clean of dust.

And a little while later the eucalyptus leaves would become young thin slices of ruby, wattles would burst into white and golden bloom, birds would sing, gaudy parrots would be flying through the scrub, and the *kookoburra* would gather his friends about him in the evening for a festival of laughter and shouts of "*ho-ho-ho—wha-waw-wha!*"

In the morning they rode out across the wet earth, which was already taking on a fresh hue. They found old Cumblegubbin's *humpey* burned to the ground, and not a sign to show which direction the old magic maker had gone.

Bonnaberry's brown eyes were bright as she lapsed into the pidgin to laugh—

"I think young white fella make plenty good boss Cullumwarra station."

YANKEE MUSIC IN THE FAR EAST

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

FAR BACK in the days of Ninety-eight the soldiers composing the first expedition lounged on the awning covered decks of hastily chartered transports, and sang from San Francisco to Manila the popular songs of the day. One of these songs was destined to introduce a new word to the dwellers of the Philippines—a word which they believed had derision in its origin, but which in reality did not.

"Just because she made them goo-goo eyes," was a chorus tang of a minstrel song. And when for the first time Jim Smith gazed into the dark orbs of a Filipino *dalaga* he turned to Tom Brown and remarked—

"Gee, but that girl can make *goo-goo* eyes." Later the insurgents under arms took the word *goo-goo* or *gu-gu* as it is variously spelled, as an insult. When the Americans learned this, it stuck, and became a veritable taunt. Of recent years the word has become shortened to *gook*, but *gu-gu* persists in Philippine fiction and fact written by Americans, and applies to the lower class Filipino.

On the other hand Filipinos of the early years of American occupation adopted American songs and music with rapidity, not having the slightest idea of the meaning of the words. This is still true to a certain extent, for not so long ago a Filipino band, stationed outside a church during a baptism ceremony in Ilocos Norte, played for the delectation of the proud father "Why Did I Kiss That Girl?"

American soldiers used to experience a wonderful kick when a funeral procession passed with the inevitable tooting of "There'll Be a Hot Time" or "After the Ball." Soon after hearing it, the insurgents parodied "Hot Time" with what the Americans called the one-two-three. It was part English and part Tagalog, but it pleased its composers so greatly that they often in their trenches sang it for the attacking white men. The chorus went:

> One, two, three—'Mericano *na-hu-li*.
> Three, fo' fi'—'Mericano *na-patay*.

This conveyed the gentle sentiment that any Americans taken prisoner would be speedily bumped off.

In retaliation the blueshirts parodied the famous "Aguinaldo March" with:

> Oh, Aguinaldo, what do you want to run for?
> Oh, Aguinaldo, why do you want to run?
> You got foot itch, and jumped the ditch.
> What do you want to run for?
> Oh, Aguinaldo—you're a son of a gun.

Later, after the dove of peace spread its wings over the war torn archipelago, and the army of occupation busied itself with love making instead of fighting, another half English, half Tagalog song came into being. It was tacked to the music of "Rings on her Fingers and Bells on her Toes." Like "Mademoiselle of Armentière" and "Hinkey Dinkey" it tended to ribaldry, but many a *cantina* has echoed to the ringing chorus of "No got *asawa*, no gotta rice," in this case the sentiment being that a Filipino girl mourns the departure of the transport on which her soldier sweetheart sails for the homeland, in consequence of which she has "no gotta rice."

With the hound pack on his trail, the escaped convict sought his brother's house — for vengeance.

STRIPED BEASTS

By HOWARD ELLIS DAVIS

"HALF of them cattle is mine," Mike Hillrath repeated in his slow Southern drawl, "an' I'll do with 'em as I please."

Seated on a big, bald faced claybank, one leg hooked over the pommel of the saddle, Mike was talking to his brother John, who leaned on the front fence. Mike was tall, broad and sparely made, with a lean, tanned face, very white teeth and pleasant brown eyes, now narrowed in anger.

John Hillrath was tall, broad and sparely made, with a lean, tanned face, very white teeth and pleasant brown eyes, now narrowed in anger. They were twins, and their neighbors, with whom they did not mingle to any great extent, could not tell them apart.

"The agreemint we made was plain as day," John replied, taking a fresh grip on the pickets of the fence under his hands. "You was to buy the cattle up the country, as you found 'em, an' drive 'em in to the range. I was to pay for 'em. You was to look after 'em on the range an'

drive 'em in to the dippin' vat every two weeks. I was to plant the big field in corn an' velvet beans; an' in December, when the grass on the range had died, they was to be put in the field, where they could feed on corn an' beans. 'Long 'bout February, when they was good an' fat, we was to market 'em an' divide the profits, fifty-fifty. Ef I had knowed what a knuckle-headed fool you was goin' to turn out, I'd have had all that sot down in writin' an' made you put yo' name to it, befo' I went into the deal with you."

"Oh, I recollect the agreemint all right," Mike asserted. "An' I've carried out my part. I bought 'em an' tended 'em. There has been lots of rain this spring an' summer, an' grass has been plentiful an' tender. The young cattle has put on extry growth an', although most of 'em was walkin' shadows when I picked 'em up, they're now fat as they kin roll. There's already a good profit in them cattle, an' ef I don't want to run my half in yo' field of corn an' beans, that's my lookout."

"But the fat on 'em is grass fat, an' ain't solid like it would be ef they fed on corn an' beans. An' you'd be sellin' on a summer market, when most of the other grass fed cattle is bein' driven in to the stock yards for sale. I'll bet they wouldn't bring within two cents a pound of what they would in February, when only fed cattle is bein' offered, to say nothin' of the extry weight they'd put on."

"That's my lookout," Mike repeated stubbornly. "Ef I dispose of mine now, it'll leave all the mo' corn an' beans for yo' hundred head."

"You know yo'self," John said angrily, "there's plenty of corn an' beans for the entire two hundred; so half of 'em runnin' in that field wouldn't eat no mo' nor no less. I ain't figurin' on sellin' them cattle to the stock yards in town. We'll ship 'em to New 'Leans, where you know we kin git a better price. An' the two hundred head will bring a better bid from a buyer than half of 'em. We ain't a-goin' to divide them critters, Mike."

"Drivin' my half into town tomorrow," Mike said with irritating persistency. "I kin use the money I'll git out of my share of the profits."

And herein lay the difference in the twin brothers. Mike was a rainbow chaser, always seeking something just beyond his reach. He would start an undertaking and work at it for all he was worth until something else, always appearing bigger, more promising, beckoned to him. Then he never rested satisfied until he was free from the first undertaking and in a position to devote his energies and resources to the second. The consequence was that although he was the best judge of range cattle in the country, the best logger in the woods and the best raftsman on the river, at the present time he had little more of worldly goods than the horse he rode, the clothes on his back and a half interest in the increase in value of the two hundred and four head of range cattle about which he and his brother were now quarreling.

John, on the other hand, with less energy and native ability, usually planned carefully and methodically before starting a venture; then, with a dogged determination, he fought it through to the finish. He owned the old home place—a considerable farm—and was known in the backwoods where they lived as a shrewd trader in cattle and land, and had made money in his numerous logging operations.

"You ain't drivin' half of them cattle nowhere," John replied to his brother's statement. "Jest remember that I paid for them cattle an' they're marked with my mark. They all belongs to me, an' when I git good an' ready—"

"So that's the stand you're takin,' is it?" Mike hurled at him. "After me workin' with 'em for months an' months, dippin' 'em an' keepin' 'em herded on the best ranges an' pullin' 'em out of bogs an' helpin' the weakest up when they was down an' hand feedin' the puny ones on cotton seed meal befo' the new grass came in the spring. You claims 'em an' will dole out to me what's comin' when you git durned good an' ready!"

With a bitterness and hatred peculiar to brothers when they do turn one against the other, they quarreled, their anger rising to white heat. At one point Mike threatened to descend from his horse and "stomp" his brother into the earth; John, on his part, threatened to go into the house for his shotgun and blow Mike into kingdom come.

At last Mike spurred his horse close to the fence that divided them, pointed a trembling forefinger down at his brother John's quivering face and, in a low voice, rife with passion, said to him:

"I'm goin' to drive down my half of them cattle an' sell 'em. An' you better not try to hinder me, you high handed, money grubbin' polecat!"

And as he rode away, John called after him:

"You dispose of one of 'em, an' I'll have the law on you for sellin' stolen goods, you shiftless, unreliable, no 'count tramp!"

His anger burning fiercely within him, Mike rode at a mad gallop back to the woods. John had said some hard things to him, and in their contemplation he forgot the hard things he had said to John. At once he began cutting out the cattle which he intended to drive into the stock yards the next day, herding them into the swamp field of old man Ranse Medlow, who had given him permission to use it for that purpose. He made as fair a division as he could, and he knew just what he had paid with John's money for each head or bunch of cattle. The amount representing the purchase price would, of course, be returned to John, after the cattle were sold. Mike decided that he would place it in the bank to John's credit; for he had fully made up his mind that never again would he speak to or have anything to do with his brother.

He had not the slightest idea that John would carry out his threat to have the law on him for selling cattle that, technically, belonged to John. It was not until he came at daylight the next morning with his two cattle dogs—each as efficient as two men on horseback—to drive the herd representing his half into town that it occurred to him that the cattle were all marked in the ears with John's mark, recorded in the courthouse.

The solution that came to him made him chuckle with sardonic amusement. The man at the stock yards would, of course, think he was John. He would make the check for the cattle out in John's name. Then Mike would take the check up to the bank where John kept his account, draw the money representing his profit and deposit the balance of the check to John's credit. Mike himself kept no bank account.

The scheme worked just as Mike had planned it, and the cashier counted out to him a goodly pile of bills, representing his profit on the cattle. Mulling over in his mind the hard things John had said to him yesterday, he left the bank to catch a street car and return to the edge of town where he had stabled his horse.

He was just about to board a car when somebody tapped him on the shoulder. Whirling about, he faced a big, blue coated policemen.

"You are under arrest, Mike Hillrath," the officer said. "Are you coming along peaceable?"

As the two returned to the sidewalk, he saw his brother John. But without meeting his eyes John turned and hurried away.

THE TRIAL was sensational and the courtroom was crowded with tanned men in jeans and blue denim, with shaggy, untrimmed hair. Mike, bitter, close mouthed, cynical, refused to engage a lawyer to defend him and counsel was appointed by the court. The two tall brothers from the backwoods, so much alike that their own lawyers could not have told them apart, conducted themselves with native dignity. But when each was called on to state his side of the controversy, he spoke in such a manner that it was plain to all that fires of the most intense hatred crackled just beneath the surface.

The jury was inclined to be lenient. But the fact remained that Mike had sold cattle that, technically at any rate, belonged to his brother John. The charges to the jury by the old judge were unquestionable. Mike was given one year at hard labor.

He was sent out to a convict camp for work on the roads. When he found himself with his head clipped and a striped suit on his back he showed no resentment. Each morning trucks took the convicts out several miles to where a fill was being built on a stretch of road. All day long Mike swung a pick, one of a gang who was loosening dirt for the scrapes. He was cheerful, willing and obedient. The guards liked him and began showing him small favors. They made him a trusty.

But always, beneath that outer cheerfulness, there ran the constant refrain:

"I'm goin' to kill John! I'm goin' to kill John!"

John had made of him a convict, a creature upon which both of the brothers had always looked with pitying horror. Mike ceased to think of himself as being a man. He was a sort of thinking animal, herded with other striped animals. They came and went at the bidding of their masters, like oxen in a team.

The greatest interest that life now held for him was in thinking of the way in which he would kill his brother. He would not shoot him. Oh, no! There would not be enough satisfaction in that. He must do it with his hands. He wanted to watch him die, slowly, horribly. But no sooner had he decided on one method than another would present itself. And at last he decided that he would kill him with a pitch fork. He would bide his time, then go to John when he was unprepared—in bed, perhaps. He would first tell him what he was going to do, then he would stick the prongs of the pitch fork into his throat or body and watch him die.

These bitter thoughts upon which he dwelled day after day brought a gradual change in the man's face. It grew lined and haggard and gaunt. White threads began to appear in the close cropped hair. His show of placidity was all on the surface. Within, he was a raging, murderous beast. He would have stopped at nothing that stood between him and the accomplishment of his purpose. His mind never went beyond the point when he would kill John and, looking into the dying eyes, curse him. Nothing after that mattered, anyhow.

Having fully decided upon the method in which he would kill his brother, it seemed that he could not wait for the time to come when he could fulfill his purpose. Daily the wait grew harder to bear. Six months passed. It seemed unthinkable that an equally long period stretched before him. He made up his mind to escape.

From beneath a nearby hill bubbled a big spring. One of the favors shown him by the guards was to let him take the buckets and fetch drinking water to the gangs at work on the road. He did not have to hurry. And at the shaded spring he could sit for a few minutes and rest.

So one day when he went to the spring after water, he set down his buckets and kept on through the swamp growth along the branch. It was twenty miles over to John's home. If he could only evade the guards for the rest of the day—and it was then afternoon—he would make his way over there and kill John this night.

He was some distance down the swamp when he heard the first outcry raised at the discovery of his escape. The swamp growth had widened and thickened. The branch had become a small creek. He smiled grimly to himself. Darkness would soon close down over him, and they would have a sweet time catching him before he had accomplished his purpose.

It was perhaps an hour later when he heard the first long drawn bay of Trilby, the lead hound, as she followed his track. Like a startled animal he stopped and turned, his head raised, his nostrils twitching.

So absorbed had he been in his thoughts that he had forgotten about the pack of

hounds kept at the road camp to chase escaped convicts. But he remembered them now. He had heard them as they were kept in training—set after trusties, who ran through the woods to make a trail—and he knew them each by name from the sound of their voices. He had heard them after a negro who had broken from the gang and run off through the woods. He had seen the negro when he was brought back, trembling, white eyed, yammering. He had heard his screams and the sound of the lash as they whipped him for running away.

He knew that one of the guards in a car had gone after the hounds. They had easily found his track at the spring and were now in full cry behind him. Lowering his head, he broke into a trot. Leaping into the shallow creek, he followed its course for a space, climbed out again, circled and entered the water once more at the same point, then splashed away downstream. Most of the time he went in that slow, lumbering trot that was pumping the air from his lungs. His breath was coming noisily through his nostrils and open mouth.

He knew that the ruse he had practised would baffle the well trained dogs for only a short time. They would set off down the creek, some of them on either side, like 'coon dogs, when a 'coon has taken to the water. He could make better progress on dry land. So he climbed the bank once more and thudded away across a cotton field, rank with last summer's dry stalks.

His labored breathing began to pierce his lungs like knife stabs and he slowed to a walk. He had not heard the dogs for some time; but presently the baying came to him again, faint in the distance, remorselessly following his trail. He could pick them out individually—Trilby, Topsy, Ring, Largo, Spot, and the others. He could not go much farther. There is a limit of endurance reached even by an escaped convict.

He saw a light over on his left and, presently, when he had drawn nearer, he found that it came from a small automobile standing on the highway, headed in the other direction. This road led to within a few miles of John's home, now apparently so unattainable.

Stepping out into the highway, he approached the stranded car and saw three negroes fixing a puncture, the tire in the road in the glow from the headlights, and a sudden wild idea came to him that he would take the car away from the negroes and continue his flight. But a moment later he realized that he knew nothing about driving an automobile, never having owned one, and in his weakened and exhausted condition he would stand a small chance of taking the car by force, then making one of the negroes drive him.

Another plan came to him. He would follow the highway to within fifty yards of the car, which he was approaching from the rear, then he would turn sharply and enter the woods across the road. The hounds would run over his tracks where he turned and perhaps go as far as the place where the negroes were at work. Confused by the new scent, they would be scattered. When, individually, they turned back, he would meet each and disable or kill it with a stick. It was a desperate plan and one not likely to succeed. The hounds probably would shy off from him and, surrounding him, hold him at bay until the guards arrived. But he determined to try it.

After he had entered the woods across the road he had some difficulty in finding just the right kind of stick, but at last broke one with his foot from a fallen sapling. It was light and dead, but sound, about two inches in diameter. Returning to the edge of the road, he waited.

The hounds were rapidly drawing nearer. Having picked up his trail where he had left the creek the last time, they were following it across the cotton field, running in a bunch, Trilby slightly in the lead—like a pack after a fox when he has broken cover and crosses a ridge to another swamp.

Gripping his stick, he waited, breathing hard between his clenched teeth. Trilby, a slender tan hound, leaped into the road, followed closely by Ring and

Topsy. It was Topsy who again picked up the trail and led the way in full cry down the highway.

The negroes had become alarmed as the convict dogs approached, and hurried with their task, shouting and laughing nervously. They got the tire back on the wheel and bolted into place just as the dogs burst from cover into the road, and two of the negroes leaped into the car, shouting to the third to hurry and crank the car so they could get away.

As Mike had expected, the dogs ran by the point where he had turned from the highway and kept on in full cry toward the little automobile, which with the turn of the crank had buzzed into life. Then, suddenly, as a new idea came to him, he leaped to his feet and raced after the dogs. Just as the car was getting into motion, he swung up behind, clinging to the empty rack where an extra tire should have been carried.

The dogs scented him as the car drew out from among them, and Largo leaped at him; but Mike struck the big hound down with his fist. For a space they chased the car, but gradually were left behind and their voices died away in the distance.

Mike clung to his insecure perch until his arms and legs grew numb, and it seemed as if each minute would be the last he could hold on. But each mile was taking him nearer to the point where he would leave the highway to go to John's house. Then, at a sudden lurch, he fell off and rolled over and over in the gravel of the road.

But he had succeeded in eluding his pursuers. The baffled hounds would return to their masters who would think, no doubt, that a confederate had picked him up on the highway. They would begin efforts to intercept him far ahead. He set off through the woods for John's house.

BENEATH giant oaks, the place lay in deepest shadow, a midnight stillness brooding. No rooster crowed; there was no dog to bark at him. From a corner in the smokehouse, where he knew that it was kept, he got the pitch fork. Hefting it in his hands, the three keen prongs glinted in the starlight. Creeping stealthily, he reached the window of John's bedroom, closed against the winter's air. Here, at the old room where they had slept together as boys, he paused, sentiment battling with the stern resolve in his heart.

But John had made of him a striped beast, herded with other beasts. His fingers on the handle of the pitch fork trembled. Slowly, inch by inch, he began raising the window, until the bottom of the sash was high enough for the wooden button, turned into place, to hold it.

Crawling cautiously in he drew the pitch fork after him. Standing there in the darkness of the room, he could hear the deep breathing of his brother on the bed. After closing the window, he struck a match and lighted the lamp on the table.

Standing at the foot of the bed, holding the pitch fork like a Jacob's staff, he called his brother—

"John!"

John opened his eyes and sat up, staring and blinking, as if unable to believe that it was his brother Mike who stood before him. As in Mike's case, the passing months had wrought a change in his face. It was lined and gaunt and gray; the brown eyes were deep sunken in his head and there were threads of white in the edges of his hair. If possible, the two brothers resembled each other more strikingly than ever.

"John, I have come to kill you."

For a long moment John gazed at his brother. Then:

"I don't blame you for feelin' that way. I'd be the same, ef I was in yo' place. But I've suffered, too, Mike. I've suffered for what I done to you until only God knows why I've kept my reason."

"Ef you had killed me in the heat of yo' anger it would have been bad enough; but to take me, yo' brother, into cote an' prosecute me, an' have me sent up as a striped convict is mo' than I kin understand. The thought of it has eat the

heart out of me. It has killed my soul. You knowed what you was doin' to me."

"Yes, Mike, that's the awful part. I knowed exactly what I was doin' to you. It seemed like the anger in me was burnin' like a fire that couldn't be satisfied. I thought of killin' you; but I wanted to make you suffer. An' then when—when I had done it—oh, my God! I have suffered a thousand times mo' than you have!"

Mike smiled bitterly.

"You won't suffer much longer, John. I'm goin' to kill you like I would a snake that hid in the grass an' bit me. I'm goin' to stick this pitch fork in you, then watch you die."

With a satisfaction bred of the long months of suffering, Mike saw the horror and the sudden pallor that overspread John's face. A clammy sweat broke out on the man's brow.

"My God!" he groaned. "Would you do that to me, yo' brother?"

"You are not my brother no mo'. You're not a man. I'm not a man. We're somethin' that God made, then got disgusted with an' throwed away. They will put me to death for killin' you, now that I come to think of it; but it don't matter to me. It don't even interest me."

"Mike," John said, somewhat recovering himself, "let's talk this thing out. I'll fix you somethin' to eat. You must be hungry. You'll feel better with some grub inside of you."

And suddenly, at the mention of food, Mike knew that he was ravenously hungry. Thinking of what he had planned, he had not eaten his lunch. Supperless, he had gone through the most strenuous physical exertions. Now the inner man was clamoring for food. But he did not intend to give John this chance of escape, so subtly suggested.

"Yes, I will eat somethin', John. But you needn't think that will save you. Nothin' can save you."

"I'll fix you some buttermilk first," John said. "It will be refreshin' an' strengthenin'."

He spoke kindly, as if in some way he would like to assuage the wrath that burned so fiercely in Mike's heart and shone with the light of fanaticism in his eyes.

But if that were his intention, the kindness of his voice fell upon deaf ears. Permitting John to fix food for him was part of Mike's plan to draw this thing out. He wanted to see fear come into John's eyes. He wanted him to beg for mercy, and deny it.

The kitchen was adjoining the bedroom and Mike stood in the door and watched his brother. The milk was in a big churn that stood in one corner. With a long handled spoon John stirred it well, so that the whey and small lumps of butter, which had risen to the top, would be well mixed in. After fumbling in a cupboard, he brought out a white pitcher, into which he poured some of the milk. He stirred the milk in the pitcher.

"It's good milk, Mike; good like it always has been here at home. I don't gather the butter out too close."

He brought the pitcher of milk and a cup and set them on the table in the bedroom.

"Now git back in the bed," Mike commanded.

"Why let me start a fire an' fry you a couple of eggs," John protested. "I have a cold pone that I can heat up. You must have some solid food in yo' belly to do you any real good."

"This will be enough of food for the present. Git back in the bed!"

Watching John over the vessel's rim, Mike raised the pitcher and began drinking. The milk was cooling, refreshing, filling. Without taking the pitcher from his lips, he drained it and with a sigh of satisfaction set it down again upon the table.

John made no effort to leave the bed again, but lay watching him. And suddenly Mike knew that John did not believe he would kill him. In a sudden new rage, he began a tirade of abuse. He decided that he would kill John now. He would wait no longer.

He told John this, watching for the ter-

ror which he wished to see, but which would not come into John's eyes. And John argued with him.

Then Mike's voice began coming to his ears strangely, as if it were a long way off, and he realized that he was very tired and very, very sleepy. That was the effect of the buttermilk, he thought. Buttermilk always made him sleepy—and a whole pitcherful on an empty stomach! In spite of himself, his eyes drooped shut. Forcibly he opened them and shook his head, felt them closing again.

And suddenly Mike realized that he had been drugged.

With an effort he jerked up his head and glared, blear eyed, at John.

"You put som'n' in that milk!" he stormed, his tongue strangely thick and unwieldly. "When you was at t' cup'd for t'pitch'. Them sleepin' pow'rs! But I'll kill you!"

Mike was sitting in a chair at the table, his hand gripping the handle of the pitch fork. He now made a mighty effort to get upon his feet. But suddenly his nerveless fingers slipped from the pitch fork, so that it fell to the floor with a clatter; his chin dropped to his chest and he sprawled over on the table, his face on his arm.

JOHN and Mike Hillrath had never mingled intimately with their neighbors. That, perhaps, is why their neighbors discussed so knowingly the affairs of the two brothers. They said that after his sensational escape from the convict guards, Mike had gone back the next day and given himself up, and that for the balance of his year's sentence he was, as he had always been, a well behaved prisoner.

They said that a change had come over John. He had considerable logging operations under way, cutting, hauling and rafting the Wiggins timber, and the energy with which he worked himself and the manner in which he drove his men reminded one more of Mike Hillrath than of his less active brother. His cattle trades were shrewd and hard driven. Never before had he displayed such energy and thrift in all of his dealings. It was said that while Mike worked as a convict in the road gang John was making money hand over fist.

With breathless expectancy they awaited a blow up when Mike was released. John had put his own brother where he was and they all wanted to see what Mike would do when he was at liberty, some predicting one thing, some another. They were all surprised, they said, when John went for him on the day of his release and brought him home with him, where Mike took up his permanent abode.

John took Mike down to the bank in town and had his account changed to their joint account. When he introduced Mike to the cashier, the banker appeared somewhat startled.

"I would have sworn, John," he said, looking fixedly at Mike, "that this was you, who have been coming into the bank every week or so with money to deposit. But then," he glanced at John, "I just can't tell you boys apart."

And neither could the guards at the prison camp.

The RUG of TAMARLANE

A Sprightly Tale of Afghanistan

By JACK SMALLEY

KABUL was getting on my nerves. There were no rugs in the bazars worth a plugged rupee, for one thing. My old bones ached with handling piles of Orientals that disgraced the weavers' art. I stunk from the smell of dyed wool and goat hair. And to top it all, there was Ben Meyers.

Meyers occupied the room across from mine in the government owned hotel, the Café Wali, and he, too, was a rug scout for an American importing company. Now, it is true that Meyers had outfoxed me on several rug deals, but that was not the cause of my distaste for his company.

He was the sort that makes a mystery out of everything. He would come whispering that the Emir of Afghanistan had a spy on his trail; the innkeeper coveted his diamond ring; his servant was putting poison in his *pilaff*.

I wish his servant had put poison in his food. But Meyers was too bright for any plotters—he told me so often enough. His beady, distrustful eyes were always concentrated in a gaze of suspicion. His long, red veined nose was in a continual

wiggle of inquisitiveness, and when he was particularly excited over some imaginary conspiracy, the black toupee that covered his bald spot would work its way down to one ear and perch there.

So I was more than eager to leave Kabul when Harry's note arrived.

The messenger found me on the veranda of the hotel, sucking cooled tobacco smoke through the long stem of a water pipe.

"Salaam," greeted the man, touching lips, head and breast with grimy fingers. "Sahib Timti el Roy?"

I grunted and reached out a hand for the paper in his sash.

Scrawled on the outside of the limp paper was "For Timothy Elroy." I flipped it open and scanned the note hastily. It might require an answer. I read:

> You'll find it in the citadel at Gazni, old bean—a mosque prayer rug that's simply priceless. By the grace of Allah and a poisonous personality, Ahmud Khan still owns the blasted thing. You owe me a tot of rum for the tip, Timothy me lad. Sorry I can't run down from Pagman, but Sir William is deluded into thinking he needs me at the legation.
>
> —HARRY

I chuckled. This was interesting and most certainly worth investigation. Giving the messenger a few handy coins, I lifted my considerable weight from the oppressed chair and went inside.

Shandi, my Afridi companion and bodyguard, was washing a turban cloth.

"We travel south at dawn," I said. "Breathe not a word of this to Meyers, O Shadow of Impending Misfortune, or I shall poison thy tea."

Shandi grinned, for an Afghan is not without humor. More, he was as glad as I to shed the dust of this place—and Meyers. He hung his turban out of the window to dry and strode from the room. I knew he was going to arrange for horses, because Shandi was that kind of fellow. One never needed to waste words on him with useless instructions.

It was near supper time, so I washed up at the bowl of tepid, sand filled water. The prospect of giving Ben Meyers the slip was fully as pleasurable as the vision of that prayer rug Harry had mentioned. Good fellow, Harry, I thought, sloshing water over my head. My top is as bald as Meyers', but I don't shame its shining glory with a toupee. No wig for me! I went downstairs, feeling well satisfied with the world.

When I returned, several hours later, Shandi's eagle beak and long jaw showed in silhouette against the window, where he sat watching the town. I switched on the electric light and sought a cigaret from the pack on the table.

The note lay there, and I picked it up. On one corner was a splotch of candle grease. I rubbed it idly with my forefinger before a disturbing thought occurred.

"How long have you been here?" I questioned Shandi.

Shandi comprehends considerable English, but he does not enjoy the sound of that infidel language. He did not answer until I put the question in Pushtu.

"From the time of the second trumpet from the Gate of the Drums," he replied.

"Was any one here?"

"No."

I sighed and sat down. That smudge of a grease spot spoiled my content completely. Some one had entered the room with a candle, so that the light would not show from the window, and read that message. No need to wonder who.

Shandi looked at the note, touched the grease spot speculatively.

"We travel *fardah?*"

"We travel tomorrow," I nodded.

For a moment Shandi reflected.

"The blind man on the roof of the house thinks no one sees his dirty tricks," he said finally, with the shrugging philosophy of his race. "We see and know. We keep watch."

WE ENCOUNTERED Ben Meyers in the Street of the Dead Mullah at Gazni the next evening. That he had followed us affected his conscience not a whit.

"What a small world, Timothy," he

said, grinning widely. "I got a tip that there was a rug here worth looking at."

"By candlelight?" I murmured.

His beady eyes glanced at me quickly and shifted to Shandi. Then he spread his hands.

"All is fair in love—and carpet snatching," he said lightly. "Shall we go together to see Ahmud Khan?"

We stalked along in silence, up the narrow, winding road that led through the ancient town toward the fortress on the hill.

On the roofs above the street we could hear the talk of people, snatches of song and the hum of humanity seeking the cool breeze of night. A burnished shield of a moon hung against the velvet curtain over our heads.

But I had no thought for the splendor of an Afghan evening. Finally I halted Meyers and spoke candidly.

"'Twill do us no good to bid against each other for that rug," I said. "Let's toss a coin to see who visits the khan. That's more sensible."

"More sensible," agreed Meyers reflectively, "but I might lose. More, we have yet to see this fabulous treasure and judge its worth. Perhaps it's a rag not worth squabbling about."

"Well, then?"

"Suppose we pay our respects to Ahmud Khan, and by praising his house manage to get a peek at the rug? Then we can withdraw and settle the affair between ourselves. One of us can return the next day and do business with him."

The moonlight caught the gleam of craft in Meyers' eyes, and I had a hunch he had something cunning in that think tank he kept covered with a toupee. But I agreed.

Leaving Shandi to wait outside, we were admitted to the citadel. Inside the torchlit walls of the ancient fortress on the hill, a guard searched us briskly for weapons. Then he led the way up a winding stair and at last into a vaulted room hung with tapestries and Orientals. Squatting among cushions at the far end of the place was the head man of Ganzi, smoking his *narghile* and blowing the smoke in two jets through his nostrils. He looked like a fire breathing dragon.

Meyers and I were more interested in the rugs that strewed the place, however, by habit gaging their worth in the carpet mart. There were several valuable Sarouks and a Beluchistan or two with hexagon patterns, but the rest were of no particular note. The mosque rug was not in sight.

Ahmud Khan rose to greet us, and Meyers, who spoke Pushtu as fluently as the next man, carried off the diplomatic honors. He made us out to be Turkestan officials, taking the southern caravan route to Herat, who had heard of the far spread fame of Ahmud Khan and desired to see him face to face.

Ben Meyers was never more plausible, never more guileless. Although his talk dwelt with exceeding brevity on me and seemed mainly bent on enlarging his own importance, I didn't care so long as we were making progress.

And as Meyers predicted, we were able to flatter the old boy into showing us through his establishment—excepting, of course, the women's quarters.

Nowhere could we spot that rug.

From room to room we trailed, until our throats were hoarse with praise of objects we hardly glanced at.

"Where the devil does he hide the thing?" I found chance to whisper to Meyers.

"Must have it locked up." Then, louder, "Of a surety, O Tower of Respect, thou hast many treasures to delight the eyes of men who have seen much and marveled less at the sights in this world."

The khan was pleased with that pretty little oration and summoned a servant for wines and cakes. We were glad enough to sit down and rest.

"We are weary," I said at last, "having traveled far. If it will not offend thee, O Virtue Riding on Lightning, we will return now to our inn."

But Ahmud Khan would not listen to that. We were his guests; we must stay with him. And over our protests he led

us away to rooms kept in readiness for visitors.

On the way he gestured toward a cabinet of teak that stood in a little alcove off the reception room.

"I have several more objects of interest there," he said. "A very ancient vase, a spear carried by a soldier of Iskander the Great, a rug once honored by the knees of Tamar the Lame—but ye shall see them on the morrow."

"Now—let us see them now!" burst out Meyers, and his nose began to quiver.

But the khan was afraid he had been overdoing the exhibiting stunt, since we had hinted at our fatigue, and marched us on.

"Tomorrow you shall see," he said, and that ended it.

Meyers was as restless as a caged monkey after that, and began to curse as soon as the khan left us.

"The stubborn ass," he exclaimed. "That's the only thing we wanted to see in his collection of prize junk. Now, how are we to know if he's got the shreds of some old shawl in there, or the real thing?"

"Forget it until tomorrow," I said impatiently, glad to take the weight off my aching feet.

Meyers was like a bloodhound on the scent, and couldn't take his mind off the object of our search. He paced the room, that wig of his sliding now over one ear, then the other; he was simply itching to get his fingers on that antique.

"I'll tell you," he said suddenly, "suppose we slip out and get a peek in the cabinet after every one has turned in?"

"Too darn' risky."

"It isn't! We're not prisoners. One look, and we can decide who tackles his nibs for that rug tomorrow. We haven't got all year to sit in this crazy town, you know."

Well, I've taken bigger risks before, and the idea didn't seem so dangerous after Meyers had talked some more. So about two hours later we slipped out into the reception room and headed for the alcove.

I had the cabinet door open when I noticed Ben wasn't behind me.

"Thief!"

The cry exploded almost in my ears. A husky giant grappled me and I tripped. The floor was hard and I was unprepared. The breath went out of me in a gust that left me helpless.

In another moment the hall was bright with torches and oil-cressets. A guard had a sword at my throat, and another seemed just about to pull the trigger of an old muzzle loader aimed at my head. Others ran around shouting at each other, raising a prodigious uproar.

There was nothing to do but lie still. The sword was taken away and two guards grabbed me roughly. I was hauled to my feet, still gasping for air. The door to our room opened, and I saw Ben Meyers come out, clad only in his shirt. He reached the alcove about the same time as the khan.

Ahmud was dressed in his retiring robe, with a revolver in one hand and a scimitar in the other. He shouted a command and silence settled over his retainers.

"Speak, Chakar," Ahmud said to the man who had tackled me.

"He is a thief, master. I saw him come from his room and open the cabinet."

By this time I was able to summon my voice, which had been jarred out of place.

"It is not true, O Khan, that I am a thief. But curiosity to see more of your treasures overcame me. I call upon Allah as my witness! Is this not the truth, my friend?" I turned to Meyers.

Ben Meyers spat viciously.

"By the Ka'aba, he lies! He is no friend of mine, this thief who violates the laws of hospitality!"

"You crook!" I howled. "You were with me!"

Meyers grinned at the guards. They grinned back. Obviously I was lying, for they had seen Meyers emerge in his shirt, long after I was captured. The khan was soon informed of this circumstance.

He came and stood before me, anger in his eyes.

"Ingrate! I make you welcome in my

home! I break bread with thee, and drink wine under my roof. To violate the law of *mailmastai* that makes us host and guest is given one punishment, death. May thy face be black before the Lord!"

With this ominous curse he gestured to his men. They half yanked me from my feet, dragged me out of the room and down musty flights of stairs into a barred pit. The door clanged behind me. Rusty bolts squealed as they were thrust into sockets. The clatter of feet and the sound of voices receded; the dim light of their torches faded. I was alone in the dungeon.

IT WASN'T a pleasant place to spend a night. The squeaking and clawing of rats under the walls continued endlessly; the air was fetid with the decay in this place of doomed men. It was noon before the light of day penetrated battlement towers and steep walls, to filter through the tiny barred window high in the cell.

I waited hopelessly, with a dry tongue and a hungry stomach. And at last some one came.

An old man with deep sunk eyes and a dirty white beard peered through the iron grating of the door. He had a crock half filled with warm water, and a chunk of bread.

He watched me with the curiosity of a child as I swigged the water.

"What didst thou steal?" he asked, lifting himself on tiptoe to see me better.

"By the beard of the Prophet, I stole nothing. My friend bore false witness to blacken my name."

"Is that the white word?" he gasped, incredulous. "But you are to die tomorrow at dawn. Have you no proof of thine innocence?"

"I can obtain it quickly," I answered, "if thou wilt help. Here, I have gold—see? And the khan himself will thank thee. Take a message to my man servant at the Inn of Kashan."

"It will not cause me trouble?"

"On the contrary, thou shalt be rewarded." And I gave him a coin.

While he poked it across the palm of his hand, like a child examining a beetle, I searched my robes for my wallet and papers. Harry's note about the rug that had caused all this adversity was there, with its telltale smudge of candle grease as a reminder of Meyers' treachery.

On the back of the paper I wrote my message, pressing the pencil hard. Shandi's education at Peshawar was meager enough, but he could make out the sense of the thing. Besides, Shandi has the faculty of perceiving what is needed at a word or a gesture. I gave the note to the old man with another gold piece and a prayer for its delivery.

Not until my cell was again in utter blackness was my prayer answered. Four soldiers clanked down the stair and, with many rattling of chains and muttered curses, they opened the door.

"Thy petition has been granted by Ahmud Khan," said one. "May he live long and enjoy many wives," he added piously, not forgetting that his men were there to hear. "As a gentleman of high birth thou wilt be granted one request before thy death."

"Then take me before the khan that I may ask this last favor of him," I said.

I breathed clean air again, and it tasted good. But when I stood before the khan again, hedged close by his soldiers, I saw that luck was still playing her shabby tricks. Ben Meyers squatted at the khan's right hand.

It was the hour between sundown and the lighting of candles and a cool breeze came through the open windows. I drew it deep into my lungs and waited. Ahmud Khan smoked placidly and framed words for the thought in his mind.

"Miserable one," he said at last, "my anger has cooled and sorrow fills my heart. Although I shall see thee executed tomorrow at dawn, I shall grant thee one boon, as thy man Shandi hast requested on thy behalf. Speak!"

"The fame of Ahmud is great; may his sons be strong," I said, conscious of Meyers' hate filled eyes on me. "Through the length and breadth of Afghanistan his generosity is a byword. Grant me this

one wish, and though I an innocent of crime against thee, I shall die without reproach on mine lips. Let me dine this night with thee and the man at thy right hand, and with Shandi. Soldiers may guard the room, and I shall not try to escape. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow I die!"

"The wish of a warrior," said Ahmud, and there was a smile on his shadowy face.

The guards again searched Shandi for weapons, running their hands over his garments for any sign of metal. I was given the same treatment, and although they eyed my wallet greedily, it was returned to me. Time enough to gain possession of it when the sword fell on my neck.

It turned out to be quite a party. Once he had made up his mind to abide by the ancient custom of granting a doomed man's last request, and thus satisfying himself that he was a generous man, Ahmud entered into the spirit of the occasion with zest.

Choice wines were brought, and the straw casings from them littered the floor. The cloth was spread in the big reception room where we sat, and soon the first steaming bowls of rice and the plates of roasted venison appeared from the kitchen.

Shandi and I had the appetites of starved men, but Meyers merely nibbled and looked askance at me down his long nose. He said little to the khan, and nothing at all to me, but his expression betrayed the suspicions that simmered under his wig.

It was time to light the torches and I chose the moment to ask another favor.

"Let us have only the blessed candelabra of the seven candles at this last dinner," I begged the khan.

The khan amiably agreed, appreciating my taste in omens. Seven, to the Eastern mind, is a number fully as significant as thirteen to a Westerner.

The candelabra was placed in the center of the cloth and we had a round of drinks.

When I saw Meyers switch his cup with Shandi's at a moment he thought himself unnoticed, I knew what bothered the fellow. He suspected we might be trying to poison the khan and himself.

Even Ahmud noticed Ben's glum attitude.

"Ho, Akbar, art down hearted?" he cried jovially. "Because I would not sell thee the sacred rug of Tamar the Lame? Drink, my friend! There are other carpets!"

The shot went home, and Meyers, or Akbar as he seemed to be calling himself, worked up a grin. It was a poor attempt.

"Come," I laughed at him, "it is I who must die, not thee! Make this last meal of mine a merry one."

He couldn't understand the thing at all. Meyers wallowed helplessly in a situation with which he could not cope. Was I so dumb that I had no feeling, or was I too clever to let it show? It irritated him to find me dominating this little hour of life instead of him, the clever one.

Catching Shandi's alert glance, I passed my hand over my bald head, and he nodded. A servant had just deposited a plate of dates on the cloth, padding back into the dim regions beyond reach of our seven mystic candles.

I reached for the dates and in drawing the platter toward me I was clumsy enough to dash over the candelabra.

Meyers cried out hoarsely; a flame had caught the cloth of his full Afghan trousers. Ahmud Khan beat furiously at a candle that menaced the tablecloth, and fell over Meyers in the confusion. In the darkness dishes were broken and someone kicked Meyers in the shins—accidentally of course.

A guard, hurrying with a feeble torch that hadn't been completely fired, tripped over me as I was slapping at a glowing spark, and the taper went flying.

Ahmud Khan was swearing fiercely, all his good humor extinguished as completely as the candles. He glowered at me when more torches arrived, and leveled a trembling finger at me.

"Throw that base born son of a dog into the dungeon!" he howled. "Put him

in chains with a collar around his thick neck! Dog," he spat, "thou hast ruined my linen! May the devil use thy fat for his fires!"

Ahmud swung about and his glance fell upon Meyers. The rug merchant dripped rice from his long nose; he looked as if he had rooted into a hot bowl of it. His black wig sat far back on his head, leaving a broad white expanse of hairless skull.

But the Khan of Gazni didn't laugh at the comical sight.

"I have thee to thank for bringing this big ox into my house," he howled. "My welcome for thee is like a fish on the shelf —within these two days it begins to stink."

His blazing eyes next focused on Shandi, standing like a frozen image at the outer ring.

"And this flea that follows the dog, throw him into the street."

Ahmud Khan stalked away in spotted and soiled majesty, and Meyers, whose self-appointed name of Akbar no longer seemed to carry the interpretation of "mighty", slunk away to his rooms to pack.

I returned to my cell to await what Kismet had in store.

FATE was not long in announcing herself. The goddess appeared two hours later in the guise of Ahmud Khan himself.

"Where is Akbar, that eater of pig litter?" he cried when the door was unlocked. Flickering cresset lamps chased shadows across his swarthy face, caricaturing his rage.

"He isn't here."

"Fool! I know that! Where does he abide? At what inn?"

I chose to appear stupid with sleep in my eyes.

"What has happened?" I asked.

The khan was willing to air his grievance, to shout it from the housetops with bursting lungs if to do so would relieve his injuries.

"He hath made off with my rug. When the servants were setting my house in order, they glanced into the cabinet. It was gone. In its place they found this!"

Dramatically the khan held up a black toupee!

Flourishing it like a scalp lock, he cried:

"Lead me to this wretch, Timti, and thou shalt go free. I shall tear that rascal limb from limb, sling him below the belly of a wild ass, poke out his eyes with burning sticks—"

The gentle soul ran out of tortures and broke off.

"It is evident to his Mightiness, the Khan, that I am innocent?" I asked blandly.

"Thou art my son if thou wilt lead me to that base born thief," Ahmud cried impatiently.

I stepped over the chains and dog collar that had fettered me and led the excited group up the stairs.

We hurried through silent streets, under stars made more brilliant by the density of the black sky. At the inn I soon learned that Ben Meyers had not delayed his departure for dawn to come. The sleepy host declared that the fugitive had lingered scarcely an hour while he packed his belongings and loaded them on a mule.

"Which way?" Ahmud demanded impatiently.

The innkeeper didn't know which way Meyers had gone. Ahmud issued swift orders. His men were to divide into two parties; one to search the road toward Kabul, the other to follow the caravan route south.

Ahmud Khan turned and plodded back toward his citadel on the hill. I didn't say goodby to him. The parting might have turned into something sentimental—or quite the opposite. I went into the inn.

Shandi was in our room, calmly smoking one of my cigarets. I picked up the package and slid it into my sash, but for once I didn't upbraid him for his impudence.

"The ghost walks from its coffin," he

observed, and indolently scratched his lean ribs.

I grinned and looked closer at him. He was sitting cross-legged on Ahmud Khan's prayer rug.

"Arise, spawn of a jackal," I cried. "Such a rug is not for thy posterior. On that hath knelt the great Tamarlane, conqueror of India!"

"Yea, and it hath nestled also under the tunic of Shandi the Fearless," he smiled.

"Thou art a thief," I declared.

"At thy orders, sahib. If I made a mistake, it was due to thy poor handwriting."

My tall Afridi uncoiled himself and spread out the rug. Together we examined the priceless relic, marveling. Its colors seemed to pulsate in the glow of the candles, its deep shades as lasting as time. Intricate symbols mirrored there the history of a race and a religion; sacred trees and springing fountains of Paradise, and the niche that must point to the body of Mohamed in Mecca when the rug is used in prayer.

"All is well," I said complacently to Shandi. "We have the rug, and upon Myers, the clever one, rests the blame. But the wig, how did you manage that?"

"I clipped the tail of a horse," Shandi replied, "and fastened the hair to a skull cap. When thou didst overturn the candles and darken the room, I traded the wig for the rug. It was not a wig to be proud of."

"But it served. Yet if Meyers is captured, he will have his own toupee to prove the other is spurious."

"Am I a flea that has no brain?" Shandi asked reproachfully. "I waited for him in the dark street, an hour ago. Here it is."

He went to the string hammock and held up Ben's skull covering.

I chuckled contentedly. So Ben Meyers thought he could get the best of old Timothy Elroy, did he? And yet, in spite of my satisfaction, I felt a qualm or two. The fate that awaited Ben was not a pleasurable one. True, they would not find the rug in his possession, but the wig left in the cabinet by Shandi was sufficient. He could talk an arm off but that wouldn't save his neck. The khan would remember how great was Meyers' desire to obtain that precious carpet.

Well, Meyers had felt no pity for me when I was cast into the shadow of death. Let him taste the cooking of his own treachery.

Nevertheless I did not sleep well. I saw the sky lighten and dawn come. With it arrived a great hubbub in the street leading to the citadel.

They had caught Meyers and were bringing him back. A crowd followed, attracted by the excitement, and the running, shouting men and children made a turmoil equal to the cursing of the soldiers trying to make headway to the fortress.

Shandi woke up and we leaned out of the window to watch the noisy parade. Ben was mounted on a donkey, his feet tied under the animal's belly. His bald pate shown like a bleached skull, and his dirt covered robe testified to an Afghan third degree.

"Poor fellow," I said.

"It is the will of Allah," Shandi murmured, a pleased expression on his face.

"We shall have to get him out of this, Shandi."

Shandi looked at me in blank surprise. When he saw I was in earnest he spat with disgust.

"Thou art a fool," he declared.

"So Meyers thought. Look at him now."

"No man puts his head in the lion's mouth twice," Shandi retorted.

I pulled on my robe, thrust my feet into sandals. Shandi watched me anxiously.

"If thou art afraid, stay here," I said, and went to the door. My man Friday was right in my footsteps.

I didn't relish the trip to the citadel any more than the tall Afridi who stalked along behind; but something had to be done. When I concocted my little plan to have Shandi steal the mosque rug and leave a wig in its place, I didn't count on my conscience. To leave Meyers in such a predicament wasn't comforting to my peace of mind.

At last we entered the gates and asked for an audience with the khan.

A MOST affable fellow was Ahmud Khan, now that Ben Meyers was in his dungeon keep. True, they had not found the rug in Meyers' possession, but how much worse if the thief had escaped to boast of his deed!

Presently Meyers would be led out to atone, in various ways diverting to an Afghan chief, for his sins. First the soldiers must fetch the torture devices.

And in the meantime Ahmud Khan squatted by his water pipe and entertained Shandi and me. We were completely forgiven.

"We are friends," Ahmud Khan declared solemnly. "I am desolated to have insulted you in my house. See, I exchange turbans with thee as a token of my love."

Whereupon I was forced to give up a perfectly comfortable turban for the chief's own, and accept its poor fit with a pretense of gratitude.

"And the rug—was it recovered?" I asked boldly.

"There was no sign of it," Ahmud returned, frowning. "Vanished as mist in the morning."

Turning to Shandi, I nodded as if I understood something which had been a mystery.

"So, as I thought," I remarked slowly. "Last night my comrade and I saw strange spirits ride through the streets of Gazni. Their horses made no noise, though they galloped over the stones. Long spears pricked the sky as these ghost warriors went by, and at their head rode a great bodied man with white whiskers and a gleaming helmet."

"Who were these *djinns?*" Ahmud Khan murmured fearfully.

I pretended reluctance to name my suspicions, but the khan pressed me.

"Who but Tamar the Lame, come to take with him his prayer rug to Paradise?" I said at last.

Ahmud glanced around him, quickly. It was bright sunlight in the room, but the old fellow looked about as if he expected to see a host of spirits gibbering at him.

"That could not be!" he protested hoarsely.

"Then where is the rug?"

And as if that settled the argument beyond refute, I yawned politely.

The khan's imagination got to working overtime, however, and he demanded more details of the night riders from Shandi. The Afridi rounded the tale out nobly; I couldn't have done better myself.

"Perhaps Tamar came back from the dead to fetch his rug," I suggested. "Has Akbar confessed to stealing it?"

"No—" doubtfully. Then, brightening, "But I have his wig!"

At my request, the khan had the wig brought. I looked at it carefully.

"Perhaps—" I began, when the door opened abruptly.

"O Ahmud Khan, the prisoner hath been bound to the stake," announced a guard.

The khan jumped up, hungry for his entertainment, and strode through the door. He still carried the wig clutched in his fist when we followed him outside into the court.

Ben Meyers writhed at his ropes in the open space before the inner fortress. His howls for pity echoed against the walls and beat accusingly on my eardrums.

"Hot pokers!" ordered Ahmud with relish.

It was time to act, if Meyers were to be saved. I stepped up beside the khan.

"Tamar the Lame also wore a wig," I remarked while the chief was waiting impatiently for the fires to be built. "This looks strangely like the one that legends say was his."

Ahmud Khan held the wig gingerly between thumb and forefinger. For the first time he must have given it a careful examination.

"Suppose we test the prisoner with it?" I asked.

Taking the wig, I placed it on Meyer's head. It hung down over his ears like a hat three times too large.

Ahmud Khan gasped. Meyers looked at us from under the shaggy toupee like some frightened animal, unable to guess what this was all about.

Then I whirled on the Khan of Gazni.

"Release this poor fellow before Tamar the Lame visits his wrath upon us!" I cried. "The great warrior hath taken his prayer rug from where ye kept it hidden these many years. Take care, or he will be terrible in his anger!"

And by the beard of the Prophet, the wild idea worked. They cut Meyers loose so fast that they nicked his ribs with the blade, and hustled him out the gates. Shandi and I found him a horse and gave him some advice.

"Get out of this country quick," I told him. "You're too thick in the skull to get by here, and next time I might not be around to save your ornery neck!"

Such, my friends, is the tale of the clever one. I never saw Ben Meyers again, though I heard that he holds an excellent position in New York as a salesman in the Oriental rug department of one of the big stores. Nor have I met the impressionable Ahmud Khan again, to get his thanks for the fine, blooded Arabian colt that I sent him.

The truth is, that colt was conscience money, not a gift. That's why I'll never grow rich at this trade—a rug buyer should have no conscience.

ONE ELEPHANT THAT THINKS

By

CAPTAIN MANSFIELD

WHO SAYS an elephant doesn't think? I often watched an elephant in the botanical gardens of Saigon in Indo-China. He was a huge fellow, almost as big as his paddock. His shadow did not grow less as time went on, for visitors to the zoo kept him well supplied with food.

It was my delight to throw him a Saigon penny—about as big as our half-dollar, with a small square hole in it. This he would toss nonchalantly over his head and over the wire netting of his enclosure to an old woman who kept a fruit stand. She promptly would toss back to him a banana, which he would proceed to enjoy.

Once I tossed him a Chinese coin with a larger square hole in it. He picked it up from the cobblestones at his feet and tossed it back to me. Thinking it was some mistake, I threw it to him again; and again he returned it to me. A native standing near informed me that he took only Saigon pennies as that was the only kind of coin the old woman would take. In a fit of perversity I tossed my unusual one to him again. This time he did not even bother to pick it up but, quickly filling his trunk with water from a nearby trough, sprinkled me liberally.

After that I was wise enough to throw him only the kind of coin that would bring results.

LISTEN TO THE MOCKING BIRD

A Story of the Texas Range

By B. M. BOWER

IN THE big hackberry tree down by the creek a mocking bird woke in the starlight just before dawn and sang a few low, chuttering notes. In the darkness that filled the wide gallery of the house nearby a wooden bed creaked.

"Dawgone that old mocker!" Kid Reeves muttered under his breath, and turned his lean young body in the bed, pulling a corner of the blanket up over a chilly shoulder.

"*Cr-cr-cr—chow-chow-chow!*" sang the mocking bird, unaware that he was interrupting the kid's dream of a shooting match just at the critical moment when he was sighting his yellowish right eye along his six-gun barrel, aiming at the ace of hearts held between brother Ben's thumb and finger.

The dream broke. The day's work pushed in upon the kid. Have to bring up the cows and milk them soon as it was light enough to see. Have to go ride the north pasture fence where those Matador mares and their colts were grazing. Have to chop up wood enough to last all day—dawgone that crooked old mesquite! The kid burrowed his head deeper into his pillow to hide from the cares of a sixteen-year-old's day.

The mocking bird accurately mimicked the call of a bob white, while the slow push of the dawn wind set all the leaves of the hackberry tree dancing around him. It swept his song through the kid's dreams, oddly mingled with the fragrance of jasmine and the pungent smell of old saddles set astride the gallery rail. It filled two pairs of overalls on the clothesline, puffing the legs so that in that dim light they suggested headless men walking on air. It brought the distant baying of a hound on the warm trail of a fox, with the shrill barking of smaller dogs making a staccato chorus. The kid squirmed, twitched the blanket up over his ear to dull these sounds.

The mocking bird teetered and sang a sweet warbly song filched from a wild canary. Halfway up a rippling trill he hushed abruptly and was heard no more. Kid Reeves stirred, turned uneasily in his bed, lifted the blanket off his ear and listened for a full minute. He pushed back the covers and crept from his warm nest. Silent as a shadow, he slipped into the house, through a big warm room and up to the open doorway of another filled with the slow, steady breathing of a man.

"Hss—pap!"

The breathing hushed as suddenly as had the mocking bird's song.

"Somebody's down by the hackberry tree, pap."

"Wheah's the dawgs at?"

"Huntin' down the creek."

"What yo'-all see?" There came faint sounds of clothing being dragged off a chair.

"Nothin'. Old mocker quit his singin' mighty sudden in the hackberry tree, like as if some strangeh was prowlin' around."

"Done flew, I reckon."

"Nevah does fly befo' dawn, pap. I shore know that old mocker. Takes a plumb strangeh to shut his mouth befo' sunup."

Old Bob grunted and pulled on his boots. He rose to his feet and left the room so quietly that even the kid scarcely heard a sound. There was another stirring in the bed and his mother spoke.

"Wake Ben and tell him to keep himself out of his pap's fightin'. How many's out theah, Bobby?"

"Cain't say, mom."

"Don't go back awn the gallery, Bobby. Theah'll be bullets flying directly."

"Got to get my pants, mom."

"Go careful, then. They might mistake you for pap and shoot yo'-all."

Like a drifting shadow the kid made his way to his bed and got into his clothes, his eyes straining to see what might be hidden in the bushes under the hackberry tree. He got his rifle and his six-shooter—even the youngest of the Reeves family slept with all his weapons beside his bed—and went tiptoeing off the gallery and around the side of the house. Through a window near the corner where he stopped to peer and listen gentle snoring issued. The kid turned his head that way, lips parted to call Ben. But he shook his head. Best way to keep Ben out of a fight was to let him stay asleep.

Rifle held at half aim, the kid waited. The light was strengthening. The thicket along the creek showed green, the tops of tall bushes moving in slow rhythm against the first faint flush of dawn. He could not see the hackberry tree, but out toward the corrals and stables the view was clear and peaceful. So peaceful that a mottled cat came walking unalarmed across the yard, a field mouse limp in her mouth.

A rifle shot crashed abruptly through the stillness. Sudden as was the sound, the kid did not so much as twitch an eyelid; but the mottled cat flattened to earth and then scooted under the house, and the snoring within the corner room ceased with a strangled snort. The kid noted the faint puff of bluish smoke rising above the bushes by the corral, and his own gun rose to full aim while he watched the thicket under the hackberry tree. A rifle barrel and a frowsy black head poked through the window close beside the kid.

"Who done that?" Ben's voice was cautiously low but full of truculence.

"Pap, I reckon."

"Who-all's he gunnin' out theah?"

"Cain't say."

The kid waited, craning around the corner of the house toward the hackberry tree. He saw a clump of bushes sway violently for a minute or two, but there was no answering shot and presently the bushes were still. Then his father left the shelter of the stable and went slipping through the brush, making his way warily toward the tree. Ben poked his rifle barrel first out of the window and crawled out after it. As the kid started to join his father Ben caught him by the shoulder and yanked him back.

"Pap'll knock the tar outa you if yo'-all go pesticatin' around when he's fightin' a Gonzales."

The kid did not say anything to that. Ben was past twenty and pretty much of a bully; the kid was just biding his time until he was man enough to whip Ben. He waited now until Ben had started boldly off toward the hackberry tree where old Bob had come to a halt and was looking down at something in the bushes. The kid followed Ben, ready to stop at the first hostile gesture; but neither man took any notice of him, so he edged up beside Ben and took a good look.

A man lay on his back in the blood spattered bushes. His hat was off and his eyes were wide open and staring astonished up into the branches of the hackberry tree as if he were looking for the mocking bird whose stilled song had cost him his life. His right hand grasped a handful of weeds; his left was flung up beside his head. A hard, handsome face, dark and smooth, with even white teeth showing between his parted lips. Except for the red stain on his shirt he might have been just lying there day dreaming up into the tree as the kid himself loved to do.

"Ain't none of the Gonzales bunch—" Ben was saying in a puzzled tone.

"Shet yo' mouth, Ben!" snarled old Bob. "Gonzales has got many a killeh you never seen, I reckon."

The kid looked from his father to the dead man and back again, his eyes puzzled. Pap might not have noticed, but the fellow did not have any rifle. Six-guns in their holsters on his belt—dandy guns with pearl steer heads on the handles, a ruby deeply embedded in the eye socket. Toted 'em well forward—so they'd be handy for the draw; that is, if a fellow favored that particular kind of gun pulling. The kid didn't, but he reckoned it was every feller to his taste. But there was no rifle anywhere in sight, and he had not so much as pulled one of his six-shooters; which was plumb strange, if he was hiding there to waylay pap. Sho' oughta have one gun out, anyway—or a rifle, if he was a Gonzales man. They liked to do their gunning from a long way off, according to what pap and the boys said.

"Bobby, yo'-all git after them cows and do the milkin'. After breakfast, git out and round up this feller's hoss. Ben, you eat a snack of breakfast and hit out fo' town—"

THE KID did not wait to hear any more. When pap told you to do a thing yo'-all had better be steppin' right now. Already he was on his way to the corral after his horse and he did not loiter or look back, though his thoughts circled round and round the dead man back there in the bushes. A Gonzales man sent over to bushwhack old Bob Reeves. No rifle, though. That sho' was mighty strange.

The kid rode through the brush down creek in the pasture, watching this way and that for the dead man's horse. But nothing came of it. He routed the two milk cows out of a dewy willow growth and sent them on to the corral in a trot, bells jangling.

As he rode back to the corral the dogs came loping out of the bushes, led by the old liver spotted hound. Panting and smiling after their hunt, they leaped upon him when he dismounted, wet muzzles nudging his arms for the petting he always gave them. But the kid had no heart for play that morning.

Couldn't keep from looking over toward the hackberry tree, though. Pap was standing there with his gun like as if he was on guard or something. Pap shore must hate to think he had shot a man

down that wasn't aiming to pull his gun on anybody. Like shooting an unharmed man, it seemed to the kid. No gun but two six-shooters and them in their holsters all peaceful like—it shore did seem plumb mysterious for a Gonzales killer.

Breakfast stood cooling on the table, with nobody making any move to eat it. Ben was gone after the sheriff and pap was all taken up with his killing, but the girls weren't eating, either. The kid sat down, reaching for a biscuit with one hand and the meat platter with the other. But though he seemed to be wholly preoccupied with his eating he saw the slow tears streaking down his mother's thin cheeks when she came to pour his coffee, and he saw the white, scared look on his sister Rose's face. Her eyes were wide and horrified as if she had seen a ghost. After a winter in Abilene she must think she'd come from school into a mighty tough place—dead man in the dooryard, breakfast on the table in the kitchen. But Jennie, the older sister, just looked excited and wanting to talk about it. The kid liked Rose best, though he did think she was getting mighty high toned, not to want anybody to call her Sis any more.

"Don't cry, mammy," Jennie said, reaching out to pat her mother's arm as she went past. "Just think how much worse it would be if he'd shot pap."

"I'm thinking how much better it would be if there wasn't so much shooting. It's an awful thing to take a man's life, Jennie."

Rose gave a gasp that sounded almost like a groan, and ran out of the room, but the kid was the only one who seemed to notice her going. Jennie was bound and determined to make a lot of gabble about it. She pushed the honey jar ingratiatingly toward the kid.

"Yo'-all got a look at him, Bobby. Wasn't it a Gonzales?"

"Cain't say."

The kid filled his mouth with buttered biscuit lavishly spread with honey. Jennie regarded him with the disfavor sisters usually display toward sixteen-year-old brothers.

"Pap has shore got you boys muzzled," she complained. "Look out yo'-all don't choke down. Mammy, just take a look at Bobby, the way he stuffs his mouth!"

"Mind your manners, Bobby, and take littler bites." Then Mrs. Reeves returned to her trouble. "'Pears like that pore feller ought to be toted inside, even if he is a Gonzales." She lifted the hem of her starched apron to wipe the tears from her face. "Your pap's getting hard as a rock, 'pears like."

"Pap's got to leave him lie where he fell till the sheriff comes and taken a look at him," Jennie wisely informed her mother. "That's to prove he was waylaying pap, to kill him. Pap just got in the first shot like he always does. I'm going out and take a look at him myself. 'Pears like that's the only way a person can find out anything awn this ranch."

"Yo'-all 'pears to think this is a circus show," the kid told her disgustedly, pushing back his chair.

He swooped his old hat—which Ben had discarded when he bought a new one—off the floor and went out with the stern dignity of his sixteen years.

His father still stood under the hackberry tree with his rifle in the crook of his arm, keeping watch over the dead. The kid flicked a glance in that direction as he pulled the milk buckets off their rack in the sun. A dozen dead men might be lying there in the bushes, but the kid knew where duty lay for him at that moment. Come hell or high water, the cows had to be milked and turned back in the pasture. The kid took long steps to the corral, the two shining tin buckets swinging from his hands, his thoughts busy with man sized affairs.

II

IT WAS the kid's first experience with any of his pap's gun fights, but he knew from hearing the boys talk just what the mode of procedure would be. The sheriff would wait and get a posse together and come out and hold an inquest on this *hombre*. First time pap had ever caught a Gonzales out that far in

the open, seems like. Their way of fighting was to cut fences in the night and let their cattle into the Reeves water tanks, and then play innocent when pap jumped 'em about it; or cache themselves in the brush and look for a chance to get in a shot when pap or one of the boys rode past. Never did get up the nerve to come this close to the house before, though. Be a long time before they'd have that much nerve again, after the way this feller panned out.

Shore hoped he could find the hoss that *hombre* rode to the ranch. If it carried the G Dot brand, pap shore would have the goods on that Gonzales bunch. Quickest way would be to take and put old Spot on the trail. He'd go plumb straight to the hoss. Couldn't fool that old houn'.

With one eye on the ridge over which the sheriff and his posse would ride into view, the kid hurried to the springhouse with his two buckets slopping white foam, got the cloth strainer and strained the milk into four brown crocks which he placed carefully on flat rocks just lapped with cold spring water. One crock wasn't more than half full, but the kid hoped his mother was too upset over the killing to notice he was a little short on milk that morning. Shore couldn't hunker down on his heels strippin' a cow's teats dry when there was a dead man's hoss cached somewhere in the brush. Mom oughta know that.

The kid legged it back to the stable, got a tie rope and went to the calf shed where he had penned the dogs. As they came yammering around him in the half open doorway he leashed the old hound and let him out, pushing back the other dogs to leave them yelping in their prison. As he neared the thing that lay under the hackberry tree, the dog's hair lifted on the back of his neck. He went forward, stiff legged, sniffing and straining at the rope. Abruptly he sank on his haunches, pointed his nose to the morning sun and howled mournfully until the kid stopped him with a yank of the rope.

"Sic 'im!" muttered the kid, pulling the hound over to a trampled line in the tall green weeds.

The dog understood. He started off, pulling the kid along toward the creek, a shallow stream now but flowing bank full in the rainy season, to the Brazos a few miles away. With the water running low and sluggish, a wide sandy strip lay under the flood gouged bank, perfect cover for man or horse. The kid called himself a fool for not thinking of it before.

Old Spot made his way down a steep, gouged trail to the sand under the bank, following the boot tracks of a man. In the loose gravel they were joined by three other sets of footprints, two going downstream and one coming back. The kid's eyes widened as he studied these tracks, and presently he dragged the dog to him, muzzled his jaws with a handkerchief so he couldn't let out one of his deep toned bays and tied him to a willow stub leaning over the bank.

Old Spot gave him one reproachful look and curled down to sleep. It was not the first time he had been squelched that way by the kid when they were out hunting together and the chase seemed nearly ended.

The kid went forward slowly, watching the bank ahead. Farther along the creek made a sharp bend and a clump of chinaberry trees leaned out over the bank, with a flat rock ledge making a comfortable seat in the shade. The kid was heading for that spot now, following the trail deeply imprinted in the sand.

Even though he was looking for the horse, he came upon it rather unexpectedly, tied close under the bank where the thick chinaberry branches rubbed the saddle and almost hid the horse from view. Even the kid's keen eyes did not glimpse it until the horse moved, flinging up its head to watch him as he approached. He looked as if he wanted to whinny—as if he were expecting his master—but a string tied snugly around his nose held him silent. But after one glance the kid never noticed the horse nor looked to see what brand it carried.

A HOT wave went rippling up his spine and into the roots of his hair at the sight of Rose standing with both hands clutching the saddlehorn and her face bowed down upon her arms. There was no mistaking that attitude of utter, abject despair. She was making little moaning sounds under her breath, like their mother had done when baby Charlie lay dead in her lap.

"What you doin' down heah, takin' on thataway, Sis?"

The kid's voice sounded rough, but his heart was like a lump of lead in his chest and the hand he laid on her shoulder trembled so he noticed it himself.

Rose shook her head, her face still hidden, and made again that moaning sound the kid hated so to hear.

"Betteh tell me 'fo' pap comes and finds yo'-all."

"Pap!" She threw up her head fiercely. "If he comes near me I'll kill him! Just like—he killed Luis!"

Blank horror swept over the kid. Luis—and Sis crying and carrying on over his empty saddle. He had to swallow twice before he could speak.

"Reckon yo' betteh tell me—"

"Oh, what's the use? He's dead. Leave me alone, Bobby. I'll kill pap for this, I tell you. Oh, if I'd just gone with him like I promised. If I hadn't made him sneak up to see what was keeping me so long—and now he's dead and I'll never see him again!" She burst into sudden, uncontrollable weeping, even more terrible to hear than her moaning.

The kid touched her timidly on the arm, moved closer and pulled her head over until it rested on his shoulder. Never did he pet a girl before in his life, but he ached all inside him now to say something or do something to comfort her.

"Hush, Rose. Don't cry, Sister. Cain't bring him back now by takin' awn thisaway. Cain't blame pap, nohow. Pap mistook him fo' a Gonzales killeh, that's all." The kid gulped. "Co'se, pap neveh suspicioned he was heah to see yo'-all."

"I wish I'd run away with him like I was going to," Rose wailed. "He made me promise—and then I went back—just to write a goodby note and say we were going to be married in El Paso and go on to Mexico City where he lived. Luis wanted me to do that, so pap and the boys wouldn't— And then I lost my nerve. I just got into bed with Jen and was afraid to go away with Luis. I broke my solemn promise. And now he's dead! Nothing I can do, nothing I can say will ever bring him back, and I'll hate pap the longest day I live."

"Talking thataway don't do any good, Sis. Yo'-all have got to think of mom. All the trouble she's had all her life—you runnin' away with a strangeh would plumb kill mom. Bettah come awn back to the house and tough it out."

"If I do I'll take a gun and shoot pap for what he did. I'll tell him to his face he's a murderer—"

"Cain't do that nohow." The kid tightened his clasp, just in case she should really make an attempt to go. "The sheriff'll be heah directly with a whole passel of strange men. Yo'-all wouldn't want to go yawpin' around befo' strangehs." The kid scowled. "Anybody know about—him? Does Jen?"

Rose shook her head, groping for her handkerchief.

"He—didn't want me to tell—"

"Jen's plumb gabby," said the kid with brotherly bluntness. "You go awn up heah in the grove and wait fo' me. I've got to take this hoss to pap befo' he comes searchin' fo' it himself. I'll be back directly, Sis. I'll see yo'-all th'ough this. Dawgoned right, I will."

He helped her up the steep bank to the rock ledge and left her there, and led the horse back up the creek, careful to walk in Rose's tracks and scuff his feet, and to see to it that the dead man's horse walked right behind him. Shuah was hell the way things had to happen. The kid felt old as pap, and yet he wanted to let go and bawl like a baby. But when you're most seventeen and all legs, yo'-all have to keep a stiff upper lip and act like a man.

At the willow stub where he had left the hound he stopped and tied the horse there instead, then stood back and flipped pebbles at it, making the animal dance and circle so the sheriff and pap and all the rest might think it had stood there a long while, the way the sand was all tracked up. It wasn't a G Dot horse, after all; of course it wouldn't be, since it belonged to Rose's sweetheart. But a rifle lay snug in its saddle case, so the kid reckoned Luis wasn't taking any chances. Went heeled like he had enemies in the country.

Where Rose's footprints went on up the creek the kid followed, stepping in her tracks and hoping the sheriff wouldn't get to wondering why a long legged feller like him went nipping along in the sand with such short steps. Shore was sly of Rose, sneaking off down the creek to meet a plumb strangeh thataway. The kid felt as if he never could trust anybody after this, but he was nevertheless very careful to tramp out every track she had made.

He returned to the horse, shied another pebble at the poor ownerless brute, for luck, and went on through the thicket to tell pap where the horse was tied and that he reckoned he'd go awn and ride the no'th pasture fence. Pap nodded abstractedly, eyeing the hill over which the sheriff would presently ride, and the kid went off to the stable and saddled two horses. No sign of the sheriff, thank the Lord.

As carelessly as he dared to act on a day of such grim beginning, the kid went into the kitchen and got a drink of water from the bucket on the bench by the door. Over the rim of the dipper he glanced at his mother, mixing down bread dough at the table.

"Plumb curious, what delicate nerves town schoolin' gives to a person," he remarked with elaborate unconcern when he had drunk. "'Peahs like sis is plumb upset oveh that dead man out theah. Reckon I'll take her to ride fence with me till things kinda settle down around heah."

"Don't hear anybody worrying about my nerves," Jennie hinted crossly. "Nobody's offering to take me for a ride, I notice."

"Yeah, I kinda noticed that myself." The kid grinned back at her, on his way to the pantry.

"Mammy, don't let that ornery kid take all he can lay his hands awn! Don't yo'-all touch that baked ham, Bobby."

The kid heard but he gave no heed. He helped himself to what he wanted and could find and made for the door with a lumpy package wrapped in cloth and tucked under his arm. Care sat heavily on his shoulders and his eyes had the seretive look of guilt, but no one noticed.

"Did yo'-all chop up any wood, Bobby?"

"No'm, not yet I ain't."

"You chop a good big pile before you go."

"Yes'm," mumbled the kid, and beat a guilty retreat before his mother could say anything more on the subject.

Chop wood—and the family teetering on the edge of disgrace, like a bird on a bough. The kid swallowed and moved his feet a little faster.

III

THE KID pulled his sweating horse to an uneasy, sidling halt and glanced appraisingly up at the sun. He lifted himself free of the saddle, swung his lean body around and frowningly scanned the hilly country behind them. He faced forward, studying the wilder country ahead, where rocky hills had been split and torn into ragged peaks and broken slopes with deep, unexpected little cañons between. The "Breaks" that particular country was called, and the name described it well. The kid had never ridden very far into its maze, but he had always hankered to explore it, and meant to as soon as he was his own boss. It looked as if he'd get his chance now, and for a very good reason; or he would if he didn't have Rose on his hands.

From the corner of his eye he watched her sitting listlessly in the saddle and

staring straight ahead. Not seeing a thing, by the look of her. Nothing in front of her eyes, anyway. The kid would bet she'd ride straight against a stone wall and never know it was there. Never care, either. He leaned and took hold of her saddlehorn, giving it a shake to attract her attention. She drew a long, shivering breath, shut her eyes tightly and opened them as if she were just waking from some horrible dream.

"I've plumb got to ride awn into the Breaks, Rose."

"I don't care."

"Reckon it's going to be a kinda long trip for yo'-all."

"I don't care how long it is."

"Don't yo' reckon yo' betteh go awn home now?"

"No, I don't."

The kid heaved a sigh and leaned to quiet his fidgeting horse. He hated to put anything else ahead of Rose when she felt like that, but it seemed as if he would have to do it. He eyed her stony face for a minute and tried again.

"Yo'-all was too busy thinkin' to take notice, I reckon, but I've been trailin' a mess of hoss tracks all the way from our line fence. 'Peahs like that whole bunch of mares and colts busted out and took to the hills—and it sho' does look as if they had human help. Might not. Pap bought some of those mares over at the Matador, and it kinda looks like they aim to hit out fo' theah old home. In that case I've got a chance to catch up with 'em. If they went up Wolf Creek Cañon they might stop to graze along in the bottoms and I could head 'em off."

"Well, why don't you do it then?" Rose did not look at him, but at least she showed that she heard.

"Plumb wild, up Wolf Creek. Wild and rough, and yo'-all might not want to tackle it."

"I don't care how wild and rough it is."

"It's fo', five miles from heah yet. Reckon it might be too much of a ride." The kid eyed her questioningly.

"Oh, I don't care if it is. I don't care for anything, any more." Rose brought her teeth together with a click.

"Must have some choice in the matteh. Yo'-all cain't expect to quit thinking and living, just 'cause yo' feel bad."

"I wish I could. I don't want to think or live. As long as I live I'll be hating pap for what he did. I'll be hating myself because I didn't run away with Luis last night. He came to make me go. He had friends waiting back in the sand hills with an extra horse for me to ride, and he—I was scared for a few minutes, because he was going to pick me up and carry me off anyway. So I promised to go with him if he'd wait. I wanted to write a letter and leave it, and explain I was going to be married to a man you-all could be proud of. So he said he'd come again tonight. And he's dead—and I feel that I'm almost as much his murderer as pap is.

"He was part Spanish, but he was the best and noblest man I ever met, and handsome too. He had the blood of the royal house of Spain in his veins, and I just couldn't bear the thoughts of having pap insult him by calling him a Mexican and a greaser. He would— Pap hates everybody with a drop of Spanish blood, on account of those Gonzaleses. He never would see that Luis was altogether different. He's no more like the Gonzales outfit than day is like night. Luis was a nobleman, and they're just thieves and outlaws. Luis was rich. He owned thousands of acres in Mexico, and he had a regular palace in the city, and for a wedding present he was going to give me jewels that had been worn by his grandmother at the court of Spain."

She poured it out without pause or emphasis, staring straight ahead with eyes that saw nothing. The kid hated to hear her go on like that, but it seemed to him better than her frozen silence. He wished he knew more about the right way to help her. He didn't know much about girls—nothing at all except what he had learned from living with Rose and Jen—but he reckoned she better talk and get it out of her system. At the same time he had to think of his own affairs.

"Sho' hate to interrupt," he ventured

mildly, "but we plumb got to go awn after the hosses or turn back right now and go home."

"Home!" Rose caught at the word. "How can I ever go home where that awful thing happened? When I think—"

"Yo'-all used to be a mighty fine *vaquero*, Rose. Hazed 'em outa the brush on the run and never let one break back. If yo'-all feel like yo' could help with the hosses, and wouldn't get too tired, I sho' would like to go awn up the cañon."

"Well, go then. I don't care if I never see home again."

THE KID heaved a sigh of relief and reined his horse into the trail ahead of her. It was going to be rough traveling from now on, and he didn't want to have his mind distracted with royal Spanish blood and crown jewels and such. He had to keep an eye out and not lose the trail of those horses, since he had been lucky enough to run across it. Sho' was strange that the whole dawgoned bunch should knock the fence down and head for the Breaks of their own accord. Looked mighty suspicious, and the kid would have given a good deal to have Rose at home where she belonged. No telling what he might be running into up ahead here. Might even be some of the Gonzales bunch running off the horses, though their ranch was off the other way and so far they hadn't come right out and rustled stock by wholesale. Not fifty or sixty mares and their colts and a few geldings.

Their style was more in doing spite work where they wouldn't get caught at it, and taking a shot at any Reeves they could draw a bead on from behind a bush when they could sift out away from there afterward. The kid wasn't sure this was the work of thieves, but if it was it didn't seem like a Gonzales trick.

He glanced back at Rose. Sho' was a fright to have a girl along if he was liable to run into any kinda trouble—but he was afraid to send her back, even if she would go. She wouldn't, but if she did she might get lost or something might happen to her. No kinda country for Rose to be riding twelve miles and more all by herself, even if she wasn't all upset and liable to do any crazy thing that might come into her head. If she went back, he'd be plumb obliged to go with her, and he sho' couldn't do that—not with all those brood mares hittin' into the hills. Sho' was hell.

"What'll you do, Bobby, if you-all find out somebody stole the hosses?"

The kid gave a start and looked back at her. Sho' was queer, havin' her speak up like that after hours of riding in a trance or else ravin' about that royal blooded Mexican sweetheart of hers. Sounded more like the old Sis that used to ride and help drive cattle, and practise shooting with him, before she went off to Abilene and came back a young lady that had to be called Rose.

"Cain't say. Ain't crossin' bridges till I get to 'em."

She didn't care much about it after all, for she didn't say any more. Still the kid noticed that she paid more attention to the things along the trail, and she kept looking up at the hills that were closing them in; cliffs and steep rocky slopes a cat couldn't climb, and the cañons twisting around among 'em, running every which way. No color in her face, though, and her eyes looked about ready to cry. Sho' hit her hard, having that happen at the ranch back there.

"You brought some sandwiches, didn't you? I didn't eat a bite of breakfast."

"Sho' did, Sis. Yo'-all will have to eat as yo' ride. Cain't stop now."

"I don't want to stop. I'd go crazy if I didn't keep riding, Bobby."

Tears stung the kid's eyelids at some pitiful quality of gameness in her voice, but he was watching his fingers manipulate the complicated knot he had invented for tying bundles to his saddle, and she never guessed how close she came to making him cry. They munched roast beef sandwiches, the bread thick and uneven, and the kid promised her a drink from a spring farther up the cañon.

"Want another'n'?"

"Not till we come to the spring. It's pretty up in here, isn't it, Bobby?"

"Sho' is. Purty wild and snaky."

For the first time since the mocking bird woke him that morning the kid grinned. Rose didn't know it, but that one remark lifted a ton of lead off his chest, seemed like. Chasing runaway horses suddenly became a pleasant adventure and dead men could be forgotten. 'Course, she hadn't forgotten her royal Spanish Luis yet—not this quick—but she sho' was showing signs of getting hold of herself. A few more hours in the Breaks here and she could go awn back home and live down her trouble.

The kid felt so light hearted that he pulled his dented old mouth harp from his shirt pocket and began to play softly while he rode. Sho' put a spring in this old bronc's legs, listening to music. Made him walk along like a circus hoss on parade. Made Rose's hoss tip his ears forward too. Made a different look come into Rose's eyes. Suddenly the expedition transformed itself into one of the old time pleasure jaunts he and Sis used to take, sneaking off together and staying as long as they dared, and like as not go home and take a lickin' for it afterward.

The kid looked up at the sky, half expecting to see a black cloud drifting off over the skyline.

The kid played the "Arkansas Traveler" with all the variations he had ever heard and some that he made up as he went along. He started to play "Annie Laurie," but stopped because his instinct warned him against anything that suggested lovers. Dawgone it, what did Rose have to go and fall in love with a royal blooded *hombre* for? Or anybody else, for that matter? Sho' did raise hell, this love business.

He wasn't forgetting the horses, though. While he played his eyes were turning this way and that, seeing everything just about. His ears were alert to every sound, even while he was apparently listening only to the music he made. So he heard a small rock off to the right of him strike gravel and roll scuttering down the cañon side, and he twisted himself instantly in the saddle to see what had caused the disturbance. As he did that, some one hidden in the rocks to the left of them gave a mocking laugh.

IV

"THAT su'prise you, I'm think!" A man, plainly a Mexican, stepped out into view, his six-shooter held negligently in his hand as if he just happened to be holding it at the moment but there really was no unfriendly significance in the circumstance.

"Sho' did," the kid admitted, his mouth harp poised halfway to his lips while he regarded the stranger.

One who knew him well would have noticed that his yellowish right eye had suddenly taken on a round, unblinking stare very much like the still gaze a caged tiger bends upon the passing crowd.

"Yo'-all throw that rock oveh theah?"

"Just for making fun; for joke. I'm not meaning it in bad way, oh, no, no! Just for laughing."

"Yeah. Well, I laughed a'ready. What yo'-all want?"

The kid did not put away his mouth harp. He looked as if he were merely waiting for the end of the interruption so he could go on playing. He did not even glance at Rose, except for one sidewise flicker of the eyes, so brief it could scarcely be noticed. Rose was showing astonishment but no fear. Had her wits about her, he reckoned—and that meant she didn't have to be knocked over with a club before she'd see the point.

"I am expect to see Luis come with thees señorita. I am not expect a boy to be making the serenade. Where is Luis?"

The kid's left toe moved over and poked Rose's horse in the shoulder so that it backed and swung away, but the kid himself was drawing his mouth harp across his lips in the first notes of the last tune he had been playing.

"Luis met somebody back theah a piece —and he stopped," he drawled indifferently. "Where yo' got the hosses?"

The Mexican's eyes widened, then narrowed while he scrutinized the kid for a minute.

"Thees señorita was not to know—"

"Aw, she knows plumb ev'ything, Pedro." The kid played a rollicky strain, but his yellow eye did not lose its tiger look. "Yo'-all didn't go and drive them hosses any fu'ther, I hope. If yo' did, Luis 'll sho'—" The mouth harp finished that dark and mysterious prophecy.

"No, no fear. But if somebody should come after—"

"Cain't. Not with Luis back theah." The kid played the rest of the tune, with a languid air that seemed to say he didn't give a dawgoned cuss about the whole affair, hosses included.

"No," laughed the man, "they do not come far when Luis is guard the pass. But is he not come weeth the señorita soon? He is say notheeng that he is taking a boy also."

"Reckon he didn't plan awn me befo'-hand. Things happened kinda onexpected this mawnin'."

"But he is come soon?" The Mexican's black eyes swept from one face to the other, weighing and studying each. "How long you theenk till Luis come?"

"Cain't say. Sho' wasn't makin' any move when I left him." The kid did not look at Rose. He did not dare.

"Thees is beautiful señorita Luis have thees time," grinned the other, his bold eyes appraising her. "I think he will hurry. Already we have wait too long. The *caballos* should be far away thees time."

"The boys are holdin' the hosses close by, I reckon," the kid ventured, his heart beating like a trip hammer.

"*Si*, Luis say we must not separate before he come weeth thees señorita. He is not expect to be here in the daylight. We should be many miles away. Me, I am worry. *No sabe.*" He shook his head. "Thees is not like Luis when he have taking señorita."

"Wish you'd call the boys," said the kid, glancing up ahead where the cañon turned sharply to the left. "I got a message for yo'-all. Git 'em down heah, Pedro."

"Pedro," corrected the Mexican, "is weeth the *caballos*. I am Miguel. And you?"

"Roberto in Spanish." The kid gravely wiped his mouth harp on his sleeve and slid it into his shirt pocket.

"Myself, I do not like thees thing. Pedro shall say what he think."

Miguel turned upon his rocky perch and, facing up the cañon where the kid's view was blocked by the ridge, began signaling with his hat, waving it in the air. He waited, evidently for a reply; waved again and turned back to the two.

"Drap yo' gun awn the ground and slide down heah *pronto*," commanded the kid, steady enough except that his voice slid up into falsetto with the last word. "Sis, you fetch his gun heah to me."

"No, Bobby, I want it myself." Rose slid from her horse and snatched up the weapon, shaking gravel out of the barrel. The kid flashed her a grateful glance. Game as they make 'em. Nothing yellow about Sis but her hair.

"Hold it awn him then till I get him tied," he ordered, in a tone worthy of Ben—or even pap. "Shoot if he lets a cheep outa him."

"Traitor! Luis will keel you! He will make of the señorita—"

"Aw, dry up!" The kid's long legs were taking him up the slope, two hastily cut saddle strings dangling from his fingers. "Pap killed Luis this mawnin'. He'll kill yo'-all, too, soon as—"

Miguel snarled like a cougar and hurled himself at the kid, swift as a striking rattler. He caught the boy full in the middle, butting like a goat. The kid gave a grunt and folded up on the ground, sliding until his boot heel caught and held. By that time the Mexican had leaped into the trail and scuttled up the cañon and around the turn. When the kid had picked himself up and quit gagging, Miguel was gone and Rose was staring bewilderedly up the cañon.

"Yo're a fine lot of help to a man! What yo'-all let that hoss thief git away for?"

"He—he went so quick, Bobby!"

"Don't yo'-all Bobby me—neveh no mo'!"

The kid strode indignantly to his horse. From the look on his face there were likely to be two killings in the Reeves family that day. He caught up the reins, flung himself into the saddle and was gone like a thunderbolt up the trail.

He rounded the bend in time to see three riders quirting their horses savagely as they merged with their own dust cloud far up the cañon. Off to one side the Matador mares were milling excitedly, long legged colts galloping wildly on the outside of the herd. The kid gave them a hurried glance and spurred on past, shooting as he rode.

Came the rapid beat of a running horse behind him, and three bullets went whining past him, one on the heels of the other. The kid set his horse up in three jarring jumps and whirled to face Rose, heading her off in the narrow trail.

"Dawgone you, Sis!" The kid was half crying with rage. "Ain't you got no sense a-tall?"

"Ah, come on!" Rose reined her pony past him. "We've got 'em on the run! Come on, Bobby!"

In a cold fury the kid rode after her, forged alongside, caught her horse by the bridle and pulled it to a dancing, wild eyed, helpless stand.

OLD BOB REEVES turned himself about in his chair at the head of the long table and gave the kid a keen, scrutinizing stare from under his black eyebrows. With a swift sidelong glance at him the kid lifted a dipper of water to his mouth. His raised arm shielded his face from that penetrating stare and gave him the air of one whose mind is at ease.

"Young man, wheah yo' been all day?"

It was the tone that always before had made the kid flinch like a nervous horse when a saddle is slapped on his back; the tone that usually was made the prelude to pap's braided quirt with the double lash on the end and a knot the size of your thumb. But something had happened to the kid that day. He had carried man sized problems through to a finish. He was a little surprised to see how the muscles didn't squint up on his shoulders. His heart didn't rise up in his throat, either. Seems like his old scare of pap was all past and done with.

He took three leisurely swallows of water, and knew that Rose was slipping around him, getting out of sight all she could. He lowered the dipper into the bucket and lifted his hat to hang it on a nail behind the door.

"Been huntin' hosses mostly," he said calmly; and the funny thing about it was that he felt calm. He could speak up and answer pap and know he wasn't scared.

"What hosses?" Old Bob's tone demanded details that would convince.

"Bunch in the no'th pastuah. Rose and I was ridin' fence up thataway. Found the fence down wheah it crosses that little wash and the entiah bunch gone."

"That the truth?" Old Bob's hawk eyes turned upon Rose.

"Why, of course it's the truth, pap."

"Hunh. So yo' went huntin' 'em, eh?"

"Sho' did. Trailed 'em up into the Breaks. Hittin' out fo' the Matador, 'peahs like."

"Git 'em?"

The kid gave old Bob an unhurried look of surprise that he should ask so foolish a question.

"I'd still be ridin', I reckon, if I hadn't got 'em." Then he added casually, "The'ah back in the pastuah—every last colt of the bunch, and the fence is up as good as I could fix it in the dark. Reckon I'll ride oveh theah in the mawnin' and make a betteh job of it."

He dipped water into the wash basin on the bench, unbuttoned his shirt sleeves, rolled back the wristbands to his bony elbows and reached for the bar of soap.

"Well, how'd yo'-all make out with the sheriff and coroner, pap?" The kid might have been asking Ben how he had made out with his coyote traps over in the sand

hills, his tone was so unconstrained. He dipped hands and soap into the basin and lathered himself to his rolled sleeves, glancing over to the table in plain expectation of a reply.

It was as if an electric current had gone round the table. Jack and Curt started and looked at each other significantly. Ben's elbow jerked sidewise, nudging Jennie into attention—Jennie with her jaws gone slack and her eyes staring incredulously at the kid! Mrs. Reeves swung her thin body forward, gazing anxiously at her husband. Rose went hurrying to an open doorway behind her like a leaf blown before a storm, and like the leaf she fluttered there in the shadow, waiting for the next gust to sweep her farther away.

Old Bob had started as if a bee had stung him. He half lifted himself from his chair, then settled back and glowered at the kid calmly sudsing his arms and face at the wash bench. The kid scooped water on his tanned cheeks, gave the back of his neck a hasty swipe or two with his fingers, blew the water from his lips and reached for the towel. And old Bob sat there, half turned away from the table, staring hard at this tall young man who yesterday had been a gangling, bashful boy who spoke only when he was spoken to.

"If yo'd stayed home yo'-all would have found out yo'self," old Bob finally grunted.

"Sho' lucky I didn't. We'd have lost a bunch of mighty fine brood mares and colts. Plumb oveh into Wolf Creek Cañon befo' Sis and I caught up with 'em. What-all'd the sheriff have to say, pap?"

Old Bob Reeves looked braced, as if he were going to get out of his chair and fling it behind him. The kid's mother sucked in her breath and her hand crept trembling across the tablecloth, timidly reaching for old Bob, yet fearing to touch him in that mood lest she explode his temper into violence. Then she let out her breath in a long sigh. The tenseness had gone out of Old Bob's muscles. His hand unclenched, reached up and gathered his beard into his palm.

"Said I've got five hundred dollahs rewahd money comin' to me f'm New Mexico. Said it was Luis Martinez I gunned this mawnin'. Bad *hombre* that's been hellin' around Silveh City and in th'ough theah." He pushed back his chair—quietly—and got up, pulling his pipe from his pocket. "Betteh hook up a team and haul oveh a bunch of wiah in the mawnin', Bob, and a few of them new posts we had left oveh f'om buildin' the big corral. Them fool mares is liable to try it again in the same place. Betteh make it hawg tight along in that corner."

"Sho' will, pap." The kid rolled a careful eye toward the indistinct figure in the shadowy door of the girls' bedroom, and went on combing his thick tawny hair before the yellow framed looking glass over the wash bench. "Sho' gave me a right smaht chase today."

"Sister, come and eat yo' supper. Yo' look plumb beat out."

"I've got an awful headache, mammy, riding so far in the hot sun. Bob had to go so far after the hosses." Rose's voice had a squeezed, lifeless sound.

"Come drink a cup of tea, anyway, and eat something. Theah's fried chicken and roastin' eahs, honey."

"Aw, let 'er alone, mom. Sis is plumb wore out, helpin' me get those hosses home. Let 'er go awn to bed if she wants to."

His mother looked up at him as if he were some stranger, and the kid grinned back and gave her shoulder an affectionate pat as he went by to his own place at the table. Ben slid over on the bench to make room for him. With a curious, questioning stare Jennie lifted the platter of fried chicken and set it down in front of the kid's plate.

Curt Reeves, twenty-three and thinking of getting married to a girl in Dickens, pushed the plate of roasting ears within the kid's reach and sat back meditatively, stroking his silky little mustache. Old Bob lighted his pipe and sauntered out on the gallery to smoke, and the Reeves family relaxed.

The kid cleaned a drumstick and two

chicken wings to white bones, stacked three juicy corn cobs beside his plate and spooned cream gravy over his fourth split biscuit. His face was calm and his eyes were untroubled. Vivid, detached pictures of the day's events kept flashing before his inner eye, but he did not let them so much as approach the gateway of speech. He walked apart from his family that night, and none but Rose would ever travel that mental trail.

"Want a piece of pie, Bobby?"

"Say, cut out that dawgoned Bobby name!" The kid whirled fiercely upon Jen. "I'm sick and tired of it."

"Well, don't bite a person's head off, Tiger Eye. Would yo'-all wish fo' a piece of pie?"

"Sho' would, Jen. Reckon I'm crabby this evenin'. Sho had a plenty big day since mawnin'."

"Reckon we all did." Jen reached out and laid her fingers across her mother's arm.

"Well, it come out betteh than I expected," her mother sighed. "It could've been worse, I reckon."

"Sho' could," murmured the kid, straddling backward over the bench and stretching his long young arms to the ceiling. "Reckon I'll go awn to baid."

IN THE big hackberry tree down by the creek the wise old mocking bird woke in the starlight and sang a few low, chuttering notes. Up on the gallery the kid's bed squeaked.

"Dawgone that old mocker! Cain't he let a man sleep when he's plumb tired out?" The kid burrowed deeper into the pillow, courting dreams.

The mocking bird teetered and sang the warbly song he had filched from a wild canary, then mimicked the mating call of a bob white running through the tender green thickets in the spring. A slow, careful tread came down the gallery and paused beside the kid's bed.

"'Sleep, Bob?"

"No, I ain't, pap."

"Reckon yo'-all have got some rewahd comin' to yo'self fo' what yo' done today. In the mawnin' yo'-all kin take Ben and run in that bunch of mares and th'ow 'em in the big corral. Reckon it's time yo'-all got a staht in stock. I'll vent a dozen head of colts and put a brand on fo' yo'-all."

"Why—that's—why, thanks, pap." The kid felt the old crimply thrill go clear to his toes.

"Bob—" the old man leaned closer—"how come yo' taken Rose off outa the way all day? Know anything about that feller and Rose?"

The kid jerked himself up to an elbow.

"He's daid," he muttered through his clenched teeth. "Right lucky he is, 'cause I reckon if he wasn't I'd kill him my own se'f." Then a thought came to him with a jolt. "How'd yo'-all find it out, pap?"

"Taken Rose's picture off the skunk. Had her writin' awn the back—to one she loved. Bob, if yo'-all eveh lets out a yeep I'll jest nach'ally skin you alive!"

"Don't fret yo'self, pap." The kid gave a snort of scorn for the threat. "I been slippin' joints all day, kiverin' things up fo' Sis. Reckon I ain't liable to staht unkiverin' it with gab."

"Yo' motheh ain't suspicionin' a thing." Old Bob's tone was gruffly tender.

"Sho' hope she neveh does, pap."

"I'm right proud of yo'-all, son."

"Shucks, pap! Yo'-all oughta know I'd plumb die fo' Sister." And he added to cover his shyness, "She's right glad yo' got 'im, pap. It was him and his gang that run off the hosses. Sis knows the kind o' *hombre* he was."

"Hunh! Learn her a lesson, I reckon."

"Sho' hope so," muttered the kid, curling himself down into the pillow. Old Bob tamped his pipe with his trigger finger and walked slowly away down the shadowed, jasmine scented gallery, trailing the pungent smoke of home grown tobacco behind him as he went.

"*Cr-cr-cr—chow-chow-chow!*" sang the mocking bird, and never stopped until his song was ended.

The Yellow Tiger

ALONG the mighty brawling Yangtze the climbing trail advanced, over boulders sharp as knife blades; high above the rocky path snow-crowned peaks and bare bleak gorges hurled down, at midday, vast black shadows, substantial, mistakable for barriers across the desolate way. The Yunnanese village of Likiang was to the south; beyond it, India. To the north and west was Tibet. Eastward, the great river continued fiercely through deep trenches cut by its swift water through the unexplored and mysterious Snow Range.

Ahead, as the bound white man on the shaggy Mongolian horse could guess well enough from the current of the river, must be the forbidden land of the Yellow Lamas, the unknown kingdom of Muli.

He had heard in Likiang of this curious country hemmed in by mountain peaks, but only thought of it now as being in the general direction he was being taken. His captors, beyond doubt, must be Chinese

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

A novelette of a young missionary doctor amid the innermost mysteries of grim Tibet

bandits, and Bancroft wished that he had taken the feeble advice of the Likiang magistrate, who had beseeched him not to travel so near the Chinese New Year, when the Yunnanese must pay their debts, no matter where nor in what manner they obtained the money. Many honest debtors, the official had informed Bancroft, turned brigands to find themselves the means wherewith to pay their obligations, and so preserve their reputations and save face.

Bancroft had laughed, having already been told a dozen varieties of bandit yarns, and never having seen a single bandit.

He had set out from Likiang with the Chinese interpreter-guard assigned to him, a mission educated boy of fourteen, who carried a muzzle loader tied with string to keep it from falling apart, for the village of Hsikou, where, according to report, men and women were sick with some illness sent by the devil—since it made one burn with heat—and which could only be cured by driving the demon away. At such times even a white man was permitted to perform what magic he could with bottles and shining steel instruments, accounted by the Yunnanese as much a part of sorcery as their own witch priests' incantations and mud idols and pig's blood letters inscribed upon moth eaten yak hide.

David Bancroft had gone to China as a member of one of the medical missions; not because he was a missionary, but since it eliminated a deal of very lurid tape and took him to the Orient quicker than any other way could have done. He needed data on fevers and infections in primitive communities, and wanted it to be first hand. China seemed the best place to do his research and isolated Yunnan the most hopeful and least sanitary province. All this the mission board had approved—it was a bishop who sent Bancroft to them with the necessary introductions—especially if he would not forget to treat a stomach ache belonging to a converted Chinese now and again and physic the missionaries themselves when they needed it.

One order of the board kept running through Bancroft's head as his led horse jogged up the river.

"Whatever you do, Doctor," he had been told, "you must remember that you are actually, while in China, a servant of the mission. You must maintain peace. Under no circumstance get into a quarrel with the constituted authorities, nor fight with the natives. We go to extremes, Dr. Bancroft; so must you. If it is necessary to turn the other cheek, we expect, and demand, that you turn it. We do more than preach, Doctor. We practise. The natives can safely do as we do, as well as what we say. However, you should have no trouble. Yunnan has never been involved in any revolution . . ."

Since, happily, nothing had been said about cigarets, Bancroft had smilingly agreed. Fight? What for? All he wanted was scientific data, and all he had to do in order to get it was to use his training and his eyes, pay his own transportation and take along plenty of fluid extract of cascara. Fight? Whoever heard of the Chinese fighting since the Boxer trouble, and look what happened to them then.

He wished futilely now that the board had insisted upon no smoking and left the fighting clause out of the bargain. The admonition had kept him from going into action when the horde had swarmed down on him an hour before. If he had made an immediate show of resistance, he believed that the poorly dressed, poorly armed crew would have turned tail and scampered back to their rat holes.

Together with his guard, he had been simply overwhelmed by numbers while trying to argue with them by proxy. They had not hurt him, had not even searched him for money. Ransom, he supposed, must be what they were after.

Not until nightfall did Bancroft really wonder about his captors. When camp was made he caught a glimpse of gold brocade under one of the bandit's verminous rags, and would have questioned the interpreter, but the boy was kept far away from him.

Bancroft's wrists had been tied together, his ankles lashed close with thongs and a pallet of skins prepared for him; he was fed a macaroni-like paste, fried vegetables, and given thick, dirt colored buttered tea. The men were apparently perfectly friendly, for they allowed him to draw a packet of cigarets from his coat pocket—watching closely until they saw what it was—and then lighted the paper tube with a splinter of wood from the fire for him. But they kept excellent watch all of the icy night. Bancroft, sleeping lightly and waking often, heard words exchanged which he did not understand—not even the ejaculations.

ALTHOUGH he was bound, and miles away from the last Chinese outpost—Likiang—the doctor was almost contented; when the ransom story finally reached the States, a lot of fellows who had horsed him about being a "kneelin', prayin' missionary" would give their ears to have been through it. They were the fellows who, when he had finished his internship, had said that it was lucky Dave had not gone into private practise; who would want a big husky like him holding their hands? It was bad enough—they said—to think of Dave puttering around with a microscope and test tubes. His own college felt that Bancroft should have come back as line coach; in a couple of years he'd give 'em a forward wall almost as good as he had been.

He had been fed up with making the Chinese understand that a thermometer was not a sinister and deadly rod of hell; and that scrawny lady missionary was getting into the habit of riding into Likiang every time she had hangnails. This ransom business was not bad, and it might turn out to be fun.

It was still amusing and interesting when the party left camp before daybreak, with the wind howling and masses of snow whirling down from the peaks. They descended to a meadow hemmed in by the Snow Range and bordered with dark forests of fir, larch and scrub pine. Although it was January, blue primroses starred the thick grass. Here, for the first time since leaving Likiang, Bancroft saw men—ragged, forlorn natives felling trees and hauling them on pairs of solid wooden wheels across the flat. It gave him less pleasure to notice that they fled when they saw the party; not when they first observed them approaching, but when they saw them for whatever they really were.

The Yangtze, Bancroft guessed, was somewhere to eastward, and if he had ever been given the chance he would have struck out in that direction. He thought of all the ways men escaped, which did him, bound as he was, no good at all.

When the fairly clear path was left behind, and the way led through heavy forests, this way and that, Bancroft became genuinely uneasy. Even the thought of relating the story at the Physicians' Club at the cocktail hour no longer cheered him. The party camped that night on a plateau; the men sat around a roaring fire. Bancroft could not have escaped even if he had wriggled from the thongs. He began to believe that the tales of the ways men eluded their captors were grossly exaggerated.

By the third day the big doctor had lost all sense of direction, nor did he smile when any of the dark hued men glanced at him.

The way still twisted and turned through black woods. Once the white man caught a glimpse of a primitive village, huts made of roughly cut logs and roofs weighed down with rocks, but the men who conveyed him steadily ahead never deviated from their path, and circled the village in silence.

For days, now, they were in the forest, and the uncanny place, with its ghostly dwellings and unseen humans, never heard, never visible, made Bancroft more and more fearful. If the men wanted ransom money, why was it necessary to take him so far away? If they did not want that, what did they want? He could not ask them; apparently they did not understand the Yunnanese words he was able to use. He had tried calling to his ex-guard, but one of the party had clapped his hand over the lad's mouth and gestured with a knife. Bancroft did not try it again, lest the boy be killed.

Bancroft was given plenty of time to think, which brought him no satisfaction and plenty of time to study his captors. They were in rags; the backs of their necks were black, filthy and grease coated. Yet the white man had several times seen gold brocade under the tatters. None of the captors spoke to him. A gesture told him when to mount, when to rest.

At last the forest was over; they reached a height from which Bancroft could see an endless succession of hills and valleys; the Snow Range assumed the aspect of an icy dragon floating in blue air; the deep valley nearest him was filled with smoky mist. Here again Bancroft saw natives, dressed differently from the Yunnanese; women in plaited skirts and short gay jackets; men in cotton trousers and goatskin shirts. He might have called out to them, but why attempt something absolutely useless and foolish? Something he could be penalized for—and less pleasantly—just as surely as if he had knifed through the line to nail a back before the ball was passed.

They were almost beside the Yangtze—on the eighth or ninth day, Bancroft did not know which—when the approach of a caravan along the winding way sent horses and men scurrying up a poorly defined side path. The going was hard; the shaggy ponies found the footing difficult. Bancroft's ankles were untied and, like the others, he walked in silence.

He needed all of his strength to keep up with the mountaineers, since his legs had been numbed with long riding. His head was working as rapidly as his legs. Caravans were always guarded. There would be the customary convoy of Chinese soldiery, a match for these brigands. Hope, like his body, mounted high. His legs were free; the thing to do was to whirl about and, as best he could, fight his way through the men behind him; batter them down somehow, his shoulder at their middles—

With this in mind, he moved more slowly. The way was difficult; there were slippery places to negotiate, boulders to surmount; Bancroft's bound hands could help him none, and spoiled his sense of balance. The leader seemed to have said something which caused the men to increase their pace; hands behind Bancroft pushed him gently forward.

Good; the closer they were to him the better.

He heard then, in the silence broken only by the far thin tinkle of a caravan bell, the piteous wail of his interpreter, in Yunnanese:

"I can go no more. I die."

There was, Bancroft saw, a knife in the air.

Out of the corner of his eye, at the same moment, he caught a glimpse of men and animals plodding along beside the Yangtze —toward Likiang.

What the white man did was instinctive, automatic. He should have turned in that instant of excitement when the boy cried out and made his dash for liberty. Instead, he let out a bellow to give himself time to smash at the man who was threatening the exhausted boy with the blade. What happened surprised him as much as death.

The leader himself, who had been standing over the Chinese lad, stuck out his tongue as far as it could go and grinned widely, as if to say that it was all a joke; before Bancroft could gather his senses two of the men had picked up the Chinese boy and were carrying him; the leader, still smiling, was pointing below.

Bancroft said aloud, as he followed the man's finger—

"Hell, they can't expect ransom from the kid!"

What he saw beside the Yangtze chilled him. The people in the caravan were almost out of sight; they had heard the yell and were running down the trail, with the soldiers well in the lead.

The path in the hills came back at last to the Yangtze, and the party forged ahead, with Bancroft in the middle. The interpreter was kept away from him as before.

DAYS and days, taking him always farther from Likiang, exhausting his brain even as it drained his powerful body. Days when a misstep would have dropped him many thousands of feet to black death; when he wondered if that might not be the thing to do! It seemed like quitting; so far as could remember he never had. Days of narrow cañons, culminating in enormous barren crags.

Bancroft wondered if he were dreaming and would wake up in his room in Likiang, with his notes methodically laid out for revision on the teakwood stand beside the bed and a bundle of letters and newspapers waiting to be read.

The Yangtze was crossed in a leaky, flat bottomed boat, from which the boatman had fled at the approach of the party. Ravines and passes, reached only in long zigzags over an almost unmarked way. Ice bound brooks. Silence always, save for the sound of the party itself, and the hiss and roar of the river over the rocks. In the distance, a cold, white walled village, and a little plain about it swarming with white heron and geese—and then up again, higher.

Bancroft's great reserve strength stood him in good stead. It was necessary to carry the Chinese boy, or to hold him to a horse. Had the daily marches been longer, Bancroft would have been in trouble, but he sensed that the men in the party and the giant Tibetan leader too were in even poorer condition than he himself. They were not, he decided, real mountaineers.

From time to time he would call some encouraging Chinese word to the boy, and while the Tibetans glared at him, and muttered their sacred formula litany, they made no move to cover his mouth or gag him.

Up—up—

What day was it? How long had they been gone? Bancroft did not know.

That night, high on an unnamed mountain, cold, exhausted almost, and with empty stomach and whirling head, Bancroft dreamed strange dreams.

They reached the top of the pass after three hours' march in the morning. Here stood a prayer pyramid of carved rock, bearing the sacred words on it: "*Om mani padme hum*"—O jewel in the lotus. Bancroft paid no attention to it at all; the blood was pounding in his ears and his eyes burned viciously. It was some time before he saw what had quickened the pace of the Tibetans.

Far below, on a verdant plain, was a walled city bathed in sunlight. Behind it was range on range of mountains. Bancroft knew that this could only be

Muli, the sacred city of the yellow lamas and their lama king.

A spirit of satisfaction seemed to have come over the Tibetans, for they talked gaily now and kept pointing first at the city and then at Bancroft.

Women in dark fringed skirts and leather jackets stared at the cavalcade as it descended into the plain; Bancroft saw that round gold coins glittered in their thick black hair. If he found them at all interesting, they were absorbed in him; one ran out and, eluding the guards, rubbed her hand over the white man's face. It came to Bancroft then, with no pleasure at all, that these people had never seen a person with white skin.

And he had thought he was being held for ransom!

They rode on and on, and at last a heavily built Tibetan in a deep red cloak with bright yellow silk showing beneath rode from the gate of the walled city to meet the returning party. He dashed clear to the leader's side, pulling his horse to his haunches, exchanged a word or two, and then, jumping from the animal excitedly, ran over to Bancroft. For a moment Tibetan stared at American, and then the lama bowed deeply, thrusting out his tongue in salutation and removing his turban; he said something which caused the leader of the party to hurry the Chinese boy forward.

Words clacked out, and finally the mission boy whined:

"He say no hurt. He say mebbe come one time, two time, velly much happiness." And, in a gush of shrill Yunnanese, "We will be killed! This is a devil's land and these be the devils themselves. Do you see the leopard skins they wear on their yellow robes? The leopards are their fathers and their wives. I know, master, because a priest told me—the same honorable priest who taught me a few of their words. We are going to die and be fed to the leopards when we are dead. Or perhaps before we have been killed. We will die! We will die horribly. *Ai-ya*, white man and master, save me from these devils!"

Since he said it all in dialect, since the words were so swift and run together, Bancroft only understood the first few, plus "kill," "die" and "death," which he had heard many times when he tried to care for those Chinese who really should have been only scientific subjects for him. He blinked the thought of death from him, frowned—since he knew that the bowing priest was watching him at every lift of the head—and said firmly enough—

"Ask why come here."

The boy translated the words, explaining fearfully to the Tibetan that his master desired to know why he had been escorted to this far land against his august and supreme wishes; he cowered down like a kicked dog when the short answer was hurled at him.

"No tell," he wailed to Bancroft. "No tell. He say mebbe so tell tomollah. Oh, master, I fear!"

So did Bancroft, but he shrugged his shoulders as if the matter were of no importance, and said evenly—

"*Maskee.*"

"Not 'never mind,' not *maskee*," the boy moaned. "He say tell tomollah but first he say—death."

"Rubbish," snapped Dr. Bancroft.

The lama in the red cloak must have asked what had been said; there were words passed between the priest and the Chinese boy, and at the end Bancroft learned that the interpreter had informed the questioner that the strange word meant that the white devils were very strong:

"And he say death stronger," the lad whispered.

While Bancroft was struggling to control his own fears, a horn blew wildly, and rank on rank of yellow robed lamas paraded through the gate. The horn blared away; at the same instant the priest standing beside Bancroft leaped to his shaggy horse and galloped ahead, his red cloak flying out behind like a trail of bloody cloth. The Tibetan leader shouted an order, and the party started for the walled city of Muli.

The twin rows of lamas marched forward,

chanting; the horn blasted the air again and the echoes battered back from the hills.

Bancroft's lips were set in a straighter line than either fear or weariness had ever been able to mold them, and he never took his eyes from the advancing yellow robed priests of Muli.

II

ROW on row of rock tiled, broad eaved houses stretched upward from the gate; places so white that they were like the facets of some gem. Underfoot were worn flagstones, and as the party passed through the gate some one cut Bancroft's thongs and he was pushed from the horse. Had he been a smaller man, the Tibetan priests would have been taller than he; as it was, they were of a height—every one over six feet. The din was tremendous. The horn howled, and somewhere in the walled town crude bombs were being exploded; the smoke hung in the still air like clouds of insects and the hum of voices added to the impression.

Bancroft could go in but one way—that in which the two lines of priests kept moving. The white man looked neither to the right nor to the left, merely walking forward in the only possible direction.

Passing an open space, a sort of courtyard, the escorting horde became silent. From a temple, clearly, there issued the wild discordant sounds of trumpets, conch shells, drums and gongs, with the weird bass grumblings of officiating priests; upward the yellow lamas pressed, noisy again and jubilant with something that made Bancroft increasingly fearful. It was as if they had what they wanted—himself—and intended doing something which boded little good, to him.

Tall men! Their robes of heavy yellowish fabric were like togas, concealing other robes beneath; some few wore elaborate caps of yellow silk, and others carried prayer drums made of ornamented half-skulls covered with skin which they beat whenever they saw a villager peer from his window.

Rising as it did in tier on tier of houses, built on a steep hillside, Bancroft was able to see what he believed must be the priests' objective in the walled city—a three-storied building, walled away from the village itself, and lined with a fringe of lamas on the flat roof. So steep was the hill that he was able to observe, to the side of this white painted temple, what must be a curious kind of altar. Made of rock and fashioned in the form of an oblong, above this praying place rose two turrets, surmounted with staffs on which hung ribbons and scarfs of yellow and red. Smoke issued from holes at the tops of the turrets, stirring the silken strips, and between them was a gilded image which glinted in the sun. Before this image—whatever it might be—was a great flat slab of rock. Here another lama knelt, head hitting the stone at every prostration; near the slab was a high pile of brushwood.

"They're Buddhists," Bancroft forced himself to think. "Their whole faith is founded on peace. I'm tired. That's why I'm worried about it."

Lest his stubborn and increasing nervousness show in his face, he began to whistle sharply.

The sound had a strange effect. Many of the lamas dropped to their knees and bowed their heads to the earth, but one great greasy fellow behind Bancroft prodded him with the point of a knife so that it pricked him. The white man walked in silence after that, doubly sober.

Many hundred yellow robed priests were in the procession. The twin lines, as the throng neared the temple, broke, and the lamas surged forward excitedly, noisier than ever. The priest who held up the ten-foot trumpet for another to blow dropped his burden and both men scampered forward, leaving the gigantic horn where it fell.

"Want reserved seats," Bancroft muttered. "But—for what?"

As they passed through the second gate and into the courtyard of the temple, he was afraid that he knew.

Beside the prostrate lama near the

altar—a man taller than any of the yellow brethren and almost as wide at the shoulder as the white man—stood the wildest figure Bancroft had ever seen. The face of this animated nightmare did not seem human at all. The eyes were slitted like a stalking cat's; one tooth protruded from the lower jaw, tusk-like, and bit up into the blackened membrane of the lip; the hands were emaciated and the fingers curved and pointed like talons; long matted hair fell to the apparition's waist.

In dress the thing was just as horrible. Only one garment covered the man—a robe made of the skins of many beasts, with tufts of hair remaining where the hides had not been shaved clean, and on these tufts, brown, black, yellow, gray, there had been sewed animal fangs and human teeth and finger bones. From a rope girdle fastened about the figure's waist long fringes of human hair hung, matted, plaited, some still ornamented—as it had been in life—with bands of coral and turquoise; in one mass of thick black hair several jade rings were tied. Over the apparition's shoulder hung a loop of red cloth, to which many shoulder blades of some small animal were bound. Most of the bones were clean and white, but to some shreds of decaying flesh and sinew still clung.

The lamas squatted down, all facing the altar, the praying lama beside it, and the wild figure. Bancroft was pushed to his knees, the Chinese interpreter somewhere nearer the flat slab. The youngster no longer whimpered, although his scrawny body swayed back and forth.

Bancroft said, "Hell," very softly, and a dirty paw reached out and covered his mouth.

No other word, he felt, expressed the situation.

THE PILE of brushwood was lighted and blazed up; the skin clad witch doctor bound up his long hair and muttered mysterious orders which the lamas carried out; trays were brought containing little images made of red stained barley flour; great lumps of yak butter were dropped on the fire, where they sputtered and spat; and as the fire died to embers the yellow robed priests became silent.

As silent as the tusked, horrible wood carved image behind the fiendish human figure decked in teeth and bones.

A slender tobacco pipe was handed the witch doctor. He smoked, inhaling the powerful crude fumes, hiccoughed loudly, shuddered violently and let his head droop. With eyes half closed, he reached for a bowl of water and, having taken a mouthful, picked up a skull drum. Then, dropping to one knee, he bowed in four directions—north, east, south and west—simultaneously spitting out jets of the water he had been holding in his mouth. The priests jerked away lest any of the fluid touch them.

The embers were at last only a grayish red glow. The lamas waited with harshly drawn breaths; only the confused mutterings and hiccoughs of the witch doctor were audible, and then even these died away.

Up in the hills behind the walled city a falcon cried. Instantly the skin clad companion of demons made his drum roll, like the humming of insects, and young lamas began to mutter, "*Om mani padme hum*" in terror; at first the reiterated notes were soft and delicate, but soon they became loud and menacing, until finally even Bancroft could hear wild shouts rending the air, as if the witch doctor had caught the scream of the falcon within the skulls. Abruptly the terrific sound ceased and the apparition began to chant, leaping about in a frenzied manner, his hair tumbling again in lank disorder over his grease coated, sweating face. His mouth now was contorted; he foamed at the lips, and the tusk, cutting into his upper lip, made the spittle pink.

Closer to the altar he jerked his way, until his skin garment with its clacking ornaments touched it; then, his fury falling like receding surf, he backed away, holding the drum high over his head. As he passed the Chinese boy, the lamas bent

forward in expectation, but the drum was untouched, and the witch doctor made neither sound nor motion.

The lamas made a way for him, which took him unerringly before the kneeling Bancroft.

Up went the shrill scream of the drum as the witch doctor's fingers raked over it; the magician made threatening gestures at the tight lipped white man, blew at him horribly with a hot, foul breath and then, at the height of maniacal frenzy—his face more awful than that of the gilded wooden image at the altar—spat squarely in Bancroft's face.

As the skin clad exorcist had approached, the white man, kneeling, had automatically crouched; when he sprang now, expecting the accusing gesture and action of the witch doctor to be the signal to drag him to the altar, it was so swiftly that not even the nearest of the lamas placed a finger on him. Witch doctor and graduate of an American medical school went down together, and on them piled as many of the priests as could get on the heap.

Almost before Bancroft's high tackle had crashed the magician to the ground, nauseous bodies pressed them both to earth. The lamas tore at whatever their fingers could reach—as often the clothing of another lama as the white man's. For that first moment Bancroft worked his hands upward, intent only on throttling the demon dispeller; and then realization of what his hands grasped sickened him as much as the thought of death. That skinny body he had smashed down, horrible as it was, had dugs like those of a she-wolf.

He relaxed, very sick, and the Tibetan above him screamed. The sound emerged from the heap only as a muffled bellow, and the word was passed along:

"*R'ju praul gyun!* The white barbarian is finished."

The mass of lamas began to work themselves from the pile; in a moment more they rose more quickly than they intended, pulled violently this way and that.

As Bancroft came dizzily to his feet, instinctively with clenched hands and lowered head, he saw why the pile had disintegrated so rapidly.

A dozen heavily built men in red cloaks trimmed with leopard skin, under which jackets of gold brocade gleamed, had yanked and tugged furiously at the lamas. Directing them was a man robed from head to feet in crimson silk; in his hand he waved a short sword and, from the manner in which he snapped orders, Bancroft knew that he must be some sort of official.

Several lamas dragged the female exorcist away; she was making no sound other than a thin wail; but what interested Bancroft was that the officer seemed to be making a mental note of those yellow clad priests who were yanking her out of sight.

The red cloaked officer snarled at the assembled, milling lamas; they began to move away unwillingly. They muttered to themselves, pointed toward Bancroft and then to the altar—where Bancroft saw a long knife lying on the flat rock—and also in the direction where the witch doctor had disappeared into the gloom of the temple doorway. If Bancroft had given way to his feelings, the result would have been a mingled laugh—not pleasant—and sigh. As it was, he tried to look as unconcerned as if such a performance happened to him every day of his life.

One side of his face was badly scratched, where a clawing lama had reached him, but he did not feel the smart of the wound at all.

THE MULI soldiery were stronger men than the sedentary lamas. All save the bare headed officer wore thick turbans, like Chinese *ch'ans;* they were booted in red stained embossed leather, and all had short swords thrust through jeweled belts. It was obvious that little liking—or much fear—existed between priests and soldiers; the latter were not gentle in hurrying the lamas away, and the priests spat venomous words as they backed off. Bancroft, head still awhirl,

saw that whenever a priest went toward the temple none of the red clad men went after him, as if it were sanctuary.

The white man stood alone until the Chinese boy crept up to him and, arms about his master's legs, began to make awful noises in his thin throat; when Bancroft was about to bend down to comfort and assure him the Tibetan officer came over and faced him.

Brown eyes stared into blue; then the official said something and, taking the corner of his silk robe, carefully wiped Bancroft's face. Whatever the words were, they set the overwrought Chinese youngster to babbling; the officer answered him by a brief word.

"He say now safe," the boy whispered, coming to his feet.

"What else did he say?" Bancroft asked grimly. He repeated this in Yunnanese, but the Chinese only shivered. "Speak," the white man ordered. "They laugh if they think we fear."

"He say my master brave to fight against so many."

Bancroft did not care about that.

"Ask why we are here," he demanded.

"I—I do not dare."

"Ask."

Bancroft's quiet tones rounded the edges of the youngster's fright, and he repeated the question timidly, almost as if dreading what he might hear.

"He tell only—" and while Bancroft waited for the boy to continue, the officer ordered his men to surround the white man and himself. "He say he knows nothing. But we are safe."

"Ask why he rescued us, then."

"Many men—other men—watched. He say so. He say priests here at devil place spot not good." And then in English and Yunnanese interspersed, "Olla time he say *t'cho T'chi*—come death and the houses of the dead. Mebbe-so I think—"

"Mebbe-so you never think at all," Bancroft said in disgust.

This much was clear; the soldiers had been sent to prevent the rites from going too far—to the slab where the knife waited. Who had sent them? Had the lamas brought him to this confounded walled city, or had some one else? None of the priests wore brocaded jackets; all of the soldiers did. The men who had captured him must have vanished when the twin lines of yellow robed lamas came into the city. Why? Or were they lamas disguised as soldiers? Or had some high priest sent the soldiers to capture a white man for their unholy business? Or—or what?

Bancroft gave over. It was the sort of thing which could not be figured out.

He smiled at the officer, who seemed to be waiting, and immediately the Tibetan threw out his hands in the international gesture of doubt and misunderstanding. Then the Tibetan leader bobbed his head, smiled also, and pointed down the hillside. He started to walk away slowly, turning back and motioning slyly to Bancroft. The dozen soldiers marched beside the white man in crude order; the leader kept close to his side. Had he kept at a distance, Bancroft knew that more than the single rock would have whizzed down from a housetop, more than a couple of bowlfuls of rancid butter been sloshed down at his head.

Clear through the walled city they went, and to a great building of stone at the farthest end from the temple, with casement windows and a single portal, at either side of which a bundle of thick, thorny sticks promised chastisement to the unobedient villagers. Over this door were cabalistic carvings, painted in red and yellow; the sill was inlaid with turquoise and broad circles of gold and silver. Instead of leading into the building itself, the door opened into a small oblong courtyard graced by a single stunted tree in a porcelain pot, lending the only cheer to the somber place.

The officer before him, Bancroft ascended a steep stairway in utter darkness. The steps were so close and narrow and the railing so low to the ground that it was useless, and Bancroft had to feel his way, stumbling again and again. At the first landing he heard F'oung chatter a goodby, and then, several men behind

him and the officer ahead, he continued up another flight, to where a butter lamp flickered before a greasy black curtain, black with age and buttered fingers rather than because of original color. The officer thrust it aside, bowed, and pointed into the room; as Bancroft walked in, the curtain flapped down behind him, hissing like sputtering grease, and a little click told Bancroft that a door had been concealed by it—and that the door had been closed and bolted.

THE TIBETANS apparently had no intention of starving him. Gray, half warm buttered tea in a porcelain bowl set in silver filagree, stood on a stand. On a golden plate, into which bits of turquoise and coral had been hammered, was an ancient yak cheese, thick with hair; there were round cakes, balls of barley flour, butter in another gold plate, chunks of gray fat, tawny mutton, in which were maggots the size of the white man's thumb.

There was no bed on the stone floor, no rug, no bit of cloth anywhere.

Bancroft went soberly to the translucent window, untied the thong which held it fast and pushed it open.

Below him, almost directly beneath, was the outer wall of Muli. He was about thirty feet above it. As far as he could see, the Snow Range rose, crag above crag, snow covered and wind blown. Between the mountains and himself was the fertile Muli valley; soft, irregular fields, with the Litang River meandering through it like a blue scarf, before it brawled its way through the gorges—Where? To join the Yangtze? Bancroft did not know.

Several roads radiated from the walled city. Which was the one he had traveled? They all looked alike; all started in the same southerly direction. For that matter, which mountain pass had he traversed? And were there more than one? And which road led to it?

Unconsciously, Bancroft sighed. Even if he were able to get out of this room, and over the stone wall below, what earthly good would it do him? It came to him, as he stood at the window, that he would rather die in the hills, alone, than furnish sport and amusement for these yellow robed devils. But would this happen now? If so, why had the Tibetan soldiers taken him from the priests? And what was going to happen next?

All his life big Dave Bancroft had wanted to know the why of things. That selfsame urge had brought him across the sea to miserable, uncomfortable Yunnan to make his own observations and collect his own data, where another man might have yearned unavailingly for escape. And this urge had its part in forcing him to eat several balls of the dry barley flour and choke them down with gulps of the greasy, ill tasting tea. He avoided even looking toward the chunk of maggoty meat and the hairy cheese.

Sounds from the walled city reached him dimly; the wailing, high pitched blare of the conches, the thrumming of drums made from human skulls, the rattle of prayer wheels clacking to the mumbled "*Om mani padme hum*" of the lamas, the shrill, angry voices of many men. Below, the portal of the stone building remained wide, but on either side stood a red cloaked guard. Had Bancroft looked down he would have seen that the soldiers were armed with long lances.

III

FOR LACK of other occupation, the steady nerved doctor kept his eyes on the greasy curtain; he stared at it until the heavy cloth seemed to undulate as he watched. Another man, realizing that no current of air blew through the room, but understanding also the optical illusion which takes place when one gazes fixedly at some object, would have averted his glance; but not Bancroft. His eyes never moved. Lest he be tricked by his senses, he found a light streak in the curtain, running diagonally downward almost in the middle, and continued to watch this spot.

It was ten minutes before Bancroft, after weighing everything, decided that some one was behind the curtain. One of the red clad soldiers left as a guard? Not probable; a guard would stay on the other side of the door which the curtain concealed. A spy? From top to bottom, inch by inch, Bancroft searched for a peep hole in the curtain; he saw none.

For several minutes more the white man sat silently; then he set about a curious business.

He stood up, careful to scrape his feet as he did so, but always watching the greasy curtain; he was rewarded by seeing it move slightly. If the hidden person—if there were one—had been peering out, the spy would have undoubtedly remained motionless, especially since the white man was staring at the curtain. Therefore—or so Bancroft decided—there was no peephole. The possibility that the unseen man might be a guard still existed—and Bancroft had already determined to find out if he were. And so he walked noisily to the window; when he was there he turned rapidly and saw the curtain tremble again.

At the window he did the one thing which would make a guard step from concealment; he banged the window frame with a fist, and did everything he could think which a man might do if he were intending to leap hopelessly into space—but the curtain did not move at all.

If a man were hidden there, it was certain that the fellow could not be any sort of guard.

It would have been entirely possible for some one to open the concealed door and step behind the curtain without Bancroft's seeing or hearing him. After what had already happened, the doctor was willing to believe that anything else might occur.

He glanced about the bare room once, and then put his original plan into operation without hesitation at all. He made no sound on the stone floor as he walked swiftly on his toes to the food stand; it was incredible that so large a man could move so noiselessly. He picked up the heavy gold bowl and went silently to the window again; here he coughed, and then walked with heavy, measured tread about the room; at times he would stop and return to the window, but each of his audible excursions brought him nearer to the greasy curtain.

Once he came very close and touched it, body carefully away from the cloth; he stepped back hastily and tramped the full round of the room. His next turn brought him nearer the curtain, and on the way he paused often, like a man undecided or deep in thought; and in the end he came about two feet from the hanging.

Lifting the bowl, Bancroft adjusted it with the fingers on his left hand tightly about the rim, so that the outward curve was toward the black curtain. Holding it head high, he placed it against the curtain as if it were his head.

The clang of steel on gold rang like a bell.

The first echo was joined by the clang of the bowl on the stone floor as Bancroft, arms wide, launched himself at the curtain. It, and what was behind it, fell as he charged.

What happened next was so rapid that even Bancroft did not know exactly what occurred. The slippery, greasy curtain slid from his grasp, and with it, despite the force of his fierce embrace, the man hidden behind it who had stabbed at the shape of a head against the cloth. Even as Bancroft was stumbling to his feet he felt something prick him. Had the concealed man's arm not been caught in the heavy cloth, Bancroft would never have known anything again.

The sound of the knife when it had struck the golden bowl seemed to blare in the room; Bancroft, eyes on the man already a dozen feet away from him, did not know that the bells at the temple were banging away at the close of prayers.

The lama who faced Bancroft was as large as he was and already balancing himself, knife ready, for the rush which

would end the conflict. The two men leaped at the same instant, but where the lama's feet were on stone, Bancroft's were on the greasy cloth. Nothing else could have saved the American; as it was, instead of meeting the priest he fell, rolled, clutched at and missed the other's legs, smashed into the food stand, and came to his feet with one of the big gold plates in his hand.

The evil faced priest had whirled, gathered himself; what Bancroft did was instinctive. His fingers closed on the heavy platter as if it were a football and as the lama's knife swung up and the yellow robed priest slashed forward, Bancroft sent the golden dish at his head as straight as any halfback ever hurled a pass to a waiting end.

The edge of the platter caught the lama squarely across the eyes; blood began to drip, to cover his broad face; a crimson jet of it spurted from his temple.

The blow almost took the powerful lama off his feet; before he could shake his shocked, dazed head, or clear his blinded eyes, Bancroft was on him and had smashed him down to the stone floor, pinning the knife before the priest could make more than a single feeble, misdirected stab with it. Even as the white man's shoulders crashed against the other in a perfect tackle, he was thinking, "This bird is going to need plenty of time out!"

The lama did.

WHERE a differently trained man would have bound the murdering priest's hands and legs first of all, Bancroft wiped blood from the lama's unconscious face. Examination—as coolly conducted as if in an emergency room at a hospital—showed that the priest's nose was broken; most of the blood poured from it. One cheekbone was gashed and the eye above it was swelling. The platter, Bancroft figured calmly, had caught the lama on the left side of his face; possibly the priest had attempted to turn his head. An irregularity in the edge of the metal disk, sharp and protruding, had cut a vein in the fellow's temple; this was bleeding freely, and Bancroft bound it tightly with strips of his own shirt, undoubtedly cleaner than the lama's robe. The doctor flipped the damaged eyelid up, but could not determine if the eye were injured, although it was already inflamed badly and would soon be entirely closed. The right cheek was scratched, but unbruised.

"Serves you right," Bancroft told the unconscious priest. "And you've got a lump on the back of your head that will remind you for some time not to pull this stunt again."

The lama stirred, and Bancroft ripped strips of cloth from the man's robe and expertly tied the wrists together.

When the lama's one eye opened, pain and doubt filled it for a moment; when he saw where he was, and knew what must have happened, he glared at the white man furiously, with so much of anger and frustration in the glance that Bancroft grinned.

"You lose," the doctor said in English. "And you took the count, fellow. For the rest of the half I think you'll sit on the sidelines. I wonder if they've got a sub for you—"

The lama snarled a word which Bancroft did not understand.

"I don't blame you," said the white man. "And you'll feel a lot worse tomorrow, old man." In Yunnanese he put the question he had asked so many times, "Where is the pain?"

The prostrate priest did not reply, but Bancroft's eyes lighted when the man lifted instinctively a hand to his broken nose, and from it to his throbbing temple.

So the lama understood Yunnanese!

While Bancroft sought for the exact words to question the lama, the priest's face became a puzzle. It ran the gamut from fear to surprise and, with his fingers about the bandage, ended in a most curious expression. Bancroft could almost see the priest think. First, the

white man had not killed him. Second, the white man, the barbarian from over the wide sea, had even stopped the blood and perhaps saved his life. That was what the bewildered priest must be thinking.

Before Bancroft could try his first question, the heavy wooden door opened and a red cloaked officer stepped into the room. Behind him came five ancient lamas, wrapped in long sleeveless gowns, and these, without a glance at the prone, bloody faced Tibetan, squatted before Bancroft.

The five old men opened books before them and without preliminary commenced chanting, the oldest leading the performance and accompanying himself and his fellows by ringing a tiny bell and, immediately after, rubbing his thin fingers against a snakeskin covered skull drum. On and on the ceremony continued—whispering old voices, tinkling bell, thrumming drum.

Bancroft at first gave the old men his attention, but after only a few minutes of the business he looked up at the Tibetan officer. This man was standing over the battered lama, his sword unsheathed; he seemed trying to make up his mind whether or not he could stab the bound yellow robed man without disturbing the incantations of the holy men squatting before Bancroft. As the five ancients lifted their drums in unison and beat upon them, he actually lowered the point of his blade.

The white man coughed—and the blade vanished behind the officer's back.

A second time the yellow robed lama's eyes went to Bancroft's, and a second time the white man grinned. Did the priest's lips writhe back in an answering grimace, or had he merely snarled an imprecation?

At all events, the officer did not continue his cat and mouse playing.

Not until their old voices began to creak did the five men cease their chant; then they whispered together, seemed agreed, and stood up—collecting their paraphernalia of prayer; then, also, they admitted being aware of their brawny, younger co-religionist.

Their leader wheezed a question; the bound lama answered. Back and forth the words went, until the most ancient priest said something to the officer which made that Tibetan—face set in a protesting expression—stand and help the yellow robe to his feet. He motioned for Bancroft to rise, and pointed toward the door.

As Bancroft, dazzled with light after the black stairway, was in the lower courtyard, he saw that the wounded priest was permitted to walk out of the entrance. He had no time to wonder about it, for the officer, accompanied by the old lamas, led the way across the courtyard and into another wing of the great stone building.

The progress became slower, for the way led between gigantic, cylindrical prayer wheels, on which the sacred "*Om mani padme hum*" was printed thousands of times; each of the old lamas gave the twenty cylinders a push as they passed, and as the wheels were large and the lamas feeble the devotions seemed unending. Even the Tibetan officer touched the lotus based cylinders, but without the fervor of the lamas.

The passageway was lighted from long, silk hung windows; they were near the end of it when the officer pushed Bancroft violently forward. What seemed only one of the heavy rafters from the roof dropped, barely missing the white man's head, and thudding to the floor between him and the Tibetan; the five lamas pushed away at the cylinders, but the officer, after one glance overhead, bent and shoved the beam to its side. Holes had been made in the wood and in each, very close together, were short, broad knife blades, which were shattered or blunted by the stone floor. Had Bancroft been beneath it . . .

It was clear that some one objected to his presence in Muli.

Bancroft had guessed that much already. Also, some one—who, again?—did want him in the walled city. Why?

A SHORT flight of rocky steps led from the corridor to a great room; in the center, as if on a throne, was a gilded god swaddled in yellow cloth, entirely hidden, apparently too sacred to be gazed upon. The lamas bowed deeply before it, and as Bancroft stepped past it, sunlight on an exposed foot of the image showed him that it was not gilded at all, but made of yellow metal. To the rear of this chamber, where Bancroft was taken, and where the lamas and officer squatted, after indicating a carpet to the white man, were enormous paintings representing Buddhist scenes. Long umbrellas of blue, yellow and purple silk hung from the ceiling; on the floor were multi-hued carpets edged with brocade, and many tiger skins.

The oldest of the lamas clapped his hands once. All of the priests sat in silence while several of their younger brethren entered through another door; these latter lifted the silk swathed image from the throne as if it were very heavy, and set it on a stand beside the dais. Since the lamas' eyes were fastened on the empty seat—or so Bancroft thought—he watched it also.

The throne was draped about with gorgeous silks; there was a soft, pillowed back rest in fierce scarlets, strident greens and electric blues; to one side of the place of honor was a table, into which silver and gems had been worked wonderfully, and on this was a skull-like bowl on a pedestal, a spherical mirror, and other objects which were strange to Bancroft. Behind the throne was a wide silken hanging, on which flamed strange flowers and fruits and curious flying birds.

A drum beat nearby. The lamas bent their heads to the carpet, muttering the sacred formula; the Tibetan officer leaped to his feet and stood very straight, one hand on his sword.

The silk curtain was pushed aside. Carried by two lamas, a living figure was set down gently on the throne. For an instant the royal personage did not need throne or elaborate robes or high peaked crimson hat to give him dignity, but the next his erect head lolled back against the pillow, his eyes closed, and he seemed hardly alive. To Bancroft's interested eyes, the body beneath the splendid robes seemed half paralyzed; he judged this by the lax right arm and the convulsive twitching of the left, but had no time to continue such a long distance diagnosis, for through the curtain there came a second figure, as marvelously clad as the first and, with him, the Chinese boy F'oung.

Bancroft's lips smiled at the youngster; the other spoke at once, carefully, as if it were all rehearsed, and in the simplest of Yunnanese words:

"If you are great doctor, greater than the *ch'an t'ou jen*—the turbaned people of the desert; and you will cure the sick king, in return you will receive your life and enough to make you wealthy. If not, you will die."

Parrot-like.

Ignoring the speech, Bancroft said quietly—

"You are well and unhurt, F'oung?"

The Chinese boy nodded.

Bancroft sat motionless a moment, and then said:

"There are some even the white man's skill can not keep alive. I can not tell what is the matter with the king until I look at him. If he can be made well, I will do it. If he can not, what you have said is unfair. Tell that to the—to the man beside you."

F'oung shivered and, as slowly as before, said in words Bancroft could not understand—

"My white master, the powerful magician, says that if the king can be made well, he will do it."

"If he loves his life, he will be successful," the Tibetan said.

The boy then told Bancroft—

"It is agreed," and shivered again.

"What is agreed?"

"That you make the king well."

Bancroft's lips twitched, but he said nothing.

"You are to begin," F'oung said, when

the Tibetan in the gorgeous robe said a word to him.

"First I must have my bag of medicines," the doctor commanded. "And I must also know if the same person who wishes to kill me wishes the king to be made well."

F'oung was almc.. past thought; he repeated Bancroft's sentences word for word. The official standing beside the seemingly sleeping king of Muli frowned, and snapped questions at the escorting officer in the red cloak; for a minute the two clacked away feverishly; finally F'oung relayed the words intended for the white man:

"He says that he has not left the king for a month and that this is all the answer a man of your sense should need—Oh, master—" in a more normal tone—"pray to all of your gods, for I am very much afraid."

Bancroft stood up, whistling through his teeth.

A grin was on his lips as he wondered what society practitioners would do if they were forced to make a diagnosis and carry out the cure with their lives as the price. Nothing to help him. No history of the case save what he might get through an interpreter who was frightened half to death. A patient only half alive. Possibly incurable. Suppose he would need to operate? Suppose a dozen things— But the start would be to take a closer look at the king.

As he came to the throne, the five lamas began to chant with renewed fervor:

"*Min chi hutuktu* — self-existent Buddha . . . *Om mani padme hum*— great merciful one . . ."

WHILE the Tibetan officer came as close as he apparently dared—he had drawn his sword and stood with it in hand—and the gorgeously attired official bent near, Bancroft began his examination. Despite involuntary interest in such a case, his heart was beating rapidly, fearful of what he might discover.

The dazed king's pulse was very slow; he breathed regularly, but slowly also; the muscles were relaxed, the skin of hands and face dry and harsh, instead of being soft and greasy like most of the Tibetans, high or low. Symptoms produced by any one of a thousand things.

While the lamas increased their chant, Bancroft inserted a thermometer, tempted to shout some magic jargon when he saw the intent face of the man beside him; the king's temperature was practically normal—nothing there to help.

Nothing for it but to question. When was the king first sick? A month ago. How did he feel? Very warm, despite the weather, and as if he had been climbing many hills. Did it pain him here?—pointing to his heart. No; the king had said that it felt as if he had been running.

Bancroft began his whistling again.

More questions. How long had the king felt as if he had been running? Only a few days. How did he feel after that? The way he is now, the Tibetan said.

"He sleeps long, and sometimes it is necessary to shout in his ear to awaken him for prayers."

Bancroft's hardly audible whistling stopped abruptly, although his lips remained pursed.

Through the Chinese boy he asked:

"Is there any one who wishes the king dead? I must know." Grimly, "Tell the man that what he has already said does not satisfy me. Ask, little F'oung, or we will both of us be killed."

One chance—one out of a million possible things! If that were it— Yes, it might be! He had seen similar cases right in Yunnan, but of a different type; it was a possibility, considering the things which had happened already.

F'oung asked.

For answer the Tibetan noble stared at Bancroft, and the white man met stare with stare; in the end the lord growled an order, and both lamas, attendants and the lone officer averted their heads. F'oung looked down at the floor. Then the tall Tibetan, head bowed in prayer, gently loosened the folds of the Muli king's robes and slowly pulled them aside.

On the chest of the king—livid, were what appeared to be the claw marks of a cat.

"*Mt'a-ye,*" the nobleman breathed.

F'oung, shaking to his shoes, repeated in Yunnanese—

"A devil."

Bending closely, the white man was not at all impressed. The wounds had been made, he judged, less than a month ago, and something had been rubbed in it to give the livid appearance.

"Tell him," he commanded F'oung, "that whatever devil did this must have done it while the—while the great man slept in sickness."

"He say—devil," F'oung said, after translating the doctor's words.

"Deviltry expresses it," Bancroft said in English.

He was absolutely certain of what he would find now. Stooping over, he lifted the stricken king's eyelids and glanced almost disinterestedly at the minutely contracted pupils.

"Tell the man that none save himself must now prepare the king's food."

F'oung whimpered:

"He is a great lord. If I say that to him he will beat me with clubs—"

"And if you do not say it, he will kill you, for the king will die."

Head on scrawny chest, F'oung played his interpreting part.

A second time the tall Tibetan stared at Bancroft. He nodded a direct understanding to the white man and then grunted an order to one of the attendants. The Tibetan officer in the red cloak, keen of ear, fingered his sword.

"The lord asks what you are to do."

"The king is to be taken to his room. The room is to be warmed. There are to be coverings for the king. Water is to be heated. I will come then and begin to make the great king well."

It was wise to give the impression that he *could* save the king's life. There was a chance of it; it all depended on how big the doses of poison had been and in what condition the king's heart was. On that, and Bancroft's skill. Bancroft was fairly sure he knew what the poison was, and he was glad that he had not allowed the obvious to confuse him. China—opium. Powdered opium, undoubtedly, or perhaps morphine. Both from the poppy, both furnishing the exact symptoms which the king had. First c..ilaration and comfort—no wonder the king had not complained about it!—and then increased heart action, deep sleep, slow pulse and respiration, dry skin, muscular relaxation, minutely contracted pupils, difficulty in arousing— Yes, there was no doubt about it.

The attendant had returned; the king was again picked up, head lolling despite some instinctive effort to hold it high; the five lamas chanted away fervently, and the red cloaked officer stood at attention.

The tall Tibetan held the curtain to one side as the king was carried through it, and then beckoned to Bancroft to follow; as the doctor snapped his bag shut, a scream ripped into the room—so like that of the giant cats up in the Snow Range that Bancroft started.

One scream, no more.

The Tibetan did not seem troubled, but Bancroft, remembering the claw marks on the king's chest, said to F'oung rapidly—

"What was that?"

The Chinese boy, having exhausted every prayer of his own country that he could recall, now bleated a version of one he had been taught at the mission which would have brought him long penances if the directing missionary had heard it. When he recovered his breath, he said—

"That—was the cook."

IV

KILL or cure! These Tibetans had a summary way of handling matters. For a moment, as he walked behind the Muli king, Bancroft wondered if he had spoken too quickly; perhaps some one other than the cook had slipped the poison into the king's food or, more probably, his gray, mutton flavored buttered tea. He had said the

first thing in his mind and rather wished now that it had remained unsaid. Kill or cure had always referred to the patient; now it meant patient and doctor! Nor was it to be an easy matter to get the king in shape again; suppose the ruler of the Muli passed into coma? Bancroft had seen such cases. The king was not far from it right now. The contracted pupils would dilate, the skin turn icy and the face livid—and then death. For the king and himself as well it was kill or cure indeed.

His one consolation was that the king was not in the last stages of an absolutely incurable disease.

While Bancroft walked through silk hung stone corridors, he dismissed the case of the sick king as he would if he were passing through hospital halls on the way to an operating room; what he would do—must do—was almost as automatic as breathing.

The pattern, or a part of it, was unfolding for him. Some one connected with the king's household—possibly the tall Tibetan noble—had ordered or sanctioned the kidnapping, placing his faith in the fame of the white magicians after everything else had failed. That was exactly the way the Chinese peasants did; no chance to help them until their own devil doctors and priests had failed. Was that why the yellow robes had interfered? Did they fear loss of prestige? If he had been brought to cure the king, however, why had the soldiery turned him over to the lamas?

Bancroft stepped into a room covered with magnificent paintings on silk; the floor beneath his feet was concealed by many rugs and skins.

Here again was a bedlike throne. At the foot of the throne dozed an old dog, long of hair; the little animal growled toothlessly at the white man, sniffed, and then, as if satisfied, dozed again.

The attendants placed the half sleeping king on the throne and removed the red hat; others in the room slipped off his outer robe and replaced it with one of white silk with a padded yellow hood; the king blinked and moved his lips, but might have been only a great doll.

In a corner of the chamber, before a small prayer wheel of decorated yak hide, another lama knelt; he clacked away at the wheel without looking up.

The ever present tea bowl was beside the throne bed, and Bancroft picked it up curiously. The inside of the golden surface was perfectly clean, and the white man's forehead puckered. To F'oung he said—

"Ask why the king drinks no tea."

"The priests have said that tea is an evil thing for him now," the Chinese boy interpreted the answer.

"Since he became sick?"

F'oung nodded.

Bancroft was disturbed. So whoever had been feeding the king powdered opium knew that tannic acid was a chemic antidote? If the murderer knew that, he certainly knew too much! Oh, well, the thing to do was to get to work, and save the man's life; Bancroft set about it swiftly and without hesitation. His sure movements seemed to impress the Tibetan noble, and every one in the room save the praying lama, who never glanced up.

While the doctor dissolved four grains of permanganate in water the sound of the clacking wheel, as he himself stirred the crystals, made him unconsciously glance toward the praying lama. No wonder the fellow did not seem interested! The upper edge of the prayer wheel was studded with gems; but, if Bancroft's senses had not played him false, in the center was either a bit of glass or a piece of polished steel, and in its surface the white man saw a baleful eye staring at him. No doubt about it; the lama was missing nothing of what happened.

As Bancroft finished preparing his reddish solution, the nobleman, through F'oung, asked—

"Is that dried dragon's blood you will give our king?"

Bancroft was about to say no but changed his answer suddenly to an affirmative. Was he mistaken, or had

that eye in the glass shown disbelief? As Bancroft lifted the king's head and poured the contents of the glass down the Muli king's throat, he was unable to watch the eye in the glass or steel on the prayer wheel; he went about his next step with accustomed hands, and in a minute had prepared a hypodermic with a powerful respiratory stimulant to counteract the opium—strychnin.

The Tibetans had already seen a thermometer, but when Bancroft picked up a fold in the king's skin, washed it with a bit of alcohol and prepared to drive the needle home, the noble muttered—

"He seems no better after the dragon's blood."

"It takes time," Bancroft explained through F'oung. "Days. The king has been sick long. It will take time to make him well again."

The noble looked at the shining glass tube, with the sharp needle at the end; to him it must have appeared more devilish than the paraphernalia of the witch doctors.

"It is this which will make the king well," Bancroft said, knowing the Chinese's fears, in many a village, of the hypodermic.

The lama in the corner stopped turning his wheel and snarled out a word or two. The Tibetan lord answered him, first by a growl, and next by a question; at the end he said to Bancroft, indirectly as always—

"First give a little of your magic water to the dog."

So that was what the lama proposed?

Bancroft's answer was simple:

"Does a dog wear clothes and drink tea? This is not for dogs, but for men."

The Tibetan looked puzzled, afraid and uncertain.

Instead of glancing toward the lama at the prayer wheel, Bancroft looked at the wheezing old dog. A drop or so would not hurt the animal, although what the entire contents of the needle would do to him Bancroft knew only too well. Dead dog. And, immediately after, dead white man.

The lama grumbled into speech again, words crackling with many "k" and harsh "g" sounds, turning away at his wheel all the time.

"A dog drinks water, and so does a man," F'oung passed the words to Bancroft. "What kills one will kill the other."

Shrugging, Bancroft agreed. He would give the dog a touch with the needle, which should satisfy lama and lord.

F'oung, eyes on the floor, passed the next interchange between priest and noble to the white man:

"He say give all. An inch of sword does not kill, but all of the sword does. If the dog awakes, is well and becomes young again, you may give more to the king. Otherwise—I am very afraid, O Master."

THIS confounded lama knew too much. Or was he just what he appeared—a dirty, ignorant native, who had guessed what he did not understand? Bancroft turned and without dissembling looked at the lama. Did the fellow know that the strychnin was sufficient to kill the dog, although it was the proper dose for the king? It did not seem possible. The lama was just another big Tibetan, in a yellow robe with a knot of red silk over one shoulder; greasy brown skin, shaved head, flat face and broad nose.

As if aware of the scrutiny, the lama stared up at Bancroft insolently, his yellowish eyes narrowing to evil slits.

The situation was crucial. If Bancroft did not give the stimulant and could not continue to give it, the king was as good as dead. If the doctor gave it first to the old animal, the dog's minutes were numbered. Either way, his own lease on life would be very short.

To make matters still worse, the nobleman said through F'oung, following another suggestion from the priest:

"No hand but mine may touch the king's sacred dog. Tell me how to put the sharp steel into the dog's skin, and I will do it myself just as you order."

So the lama feared that Bancroft would

merely shoot the strychnin over the dog's hair instead of actually inserting the needle? The fellow *did* know too much, or he was a real magician.

Instead of protesting uselessly, Bancroft said quietly:

"It is no worse for me to touch the dog than to touch the king. Is the dog more sacred? If the king is to be made well, I must touch him also."

The Tibetan seemed to think that it was hardly the same thing. He and the lama both talked at once, to themselves and to Bancroft, and the Chinese youngster was lost in a maze of words; the noble, now, was obviously frightened and stubborn. At the end, when a complete *impasse* seemed reached, Bancroft played his only remaining card.

"I have only a little of this magic," he said grimly. "There is no more. If it is all used on the dog, there will be none left for the king, and the king will die. Since I wish to live, I do not want the king to die. Does the great lord desire his death, that he delays so long? If that is so, give the medicine to the animal."

The lord was torn this way and that, with the lama ceaselessly at him, he muttered that the five highest priests had sanctioned the treatment by the white barbarian; that the magician from over the sea had been captured and brought here—but if the powerful Lama Brgyn-pa feared for the king's life . . .

The lama did and was not silent about it.

It was Bancroft himself who found the way out.

"Let me give the priest half of the medicine," he said suddenly. "The other half I will give to the king."

The lama glared up at Bancroft and mumbled his defeat; and the lord nodded to Bancroft.

The big white man waited for no word. He stepped toward the priest, but the lama ducked down into his robe and turned away mightily at the prayer wheel. Instead of appealing to the nobleman, Bancroft returned to the bed throne, inserted the keen needle expertly and drove home the plunger of the hypodermic. The dose, of course, would need repeating; he would tell them that each time it was a different sort of magic, good only at certain hours of the day.

If the contents of the hypo had been shot into the little old dog, Bancroft knew that the animal, by now, would have been jerking out his feeble life—and he himself on the way to join the cook in the afterworld.

While the lama mumbled his "*Om mani padme hum*" and the wheel whirled the prayer heavenward attendants bundled the body of the king warmly; soon the doctor said:

"You can see. Your king is better already."

The Tibetan lord realized that his master was breathing more easily, and said gravely, almost humbly:

"You are a great and powerful magician. If the king becomes well—"

His gesture, a wide flung hand, was entirely expressive. It took in the bowls of solid gold, the glorious silks and carpets and, lastly, the far hills toward Yunan. Reward and freedom.

While Bancroft and the Tibetan watched the regularly breathing king, the Lama Brgyn-pa slipped close to them; out of a corner of his eye Bancroft saw a huge hand close about the medicine case. His own shot down and fastened on the lama's.

For a split second Bancroft's keen gaze was on the back of the priest's hand; then, eye to eye, each tried to stare the other down.

It was the nobleman who broke the sudden silence by snapping out a question; Brgyn-pa's lips writhed, but when he answered it was in a placating whine; and when Bancroft freed him he left the room hastily, not stopping for his drum and praying apparatus.

"Explain to your master that he only wanted to bless the magic," the Tibetan said to F'oung.

Bancroft, in turn, said:

"Ask the lord who this priest is." He was able to guess what sort of blessing the

lama had given the drugs. "Find out how long he has been in Muli, also."

After contenting himself by seeing that the king was still breathing quietly, the Tibetan squatted on a rug at the foot of the throne bed and motioned for Bancroft to do the same, the Chinese boy was allowed to stand.

The lama, the nobleman said, was a revered follower of the Great Compassionate One; he had been in Lhasa and worshipped at the temple of the dreaded Ke-sar, together with having performed many acts of virtue . . .

On droned the tale, with F'oung doing his best to convey the meaning to Bancroft, and doing none too good a job of it.

HERE and there the white man picked up something of interest when he understood the Chinese boy's Yunnanese; Brgyn-pa had been in Muli for six months; Brgyn-pa was a lama of great wisdom and had often given the king the benefit of observations made on his pilgrimages; Brgyn-pa was helpful when one suffered from pain; Brgyn-pa could even teach the lesser lamas their tasks—those who printed books from wooden type, who cared for the horses, who were the metal workers of the walled city. He had taken the vow of chastity, and in addition practised poverty and abstinence from tobacco, liquor and gambling; he did not break the first vow even by snatching a hat from one of the Tibetan women, which must be redeemed from the lamas by visiting them at night—he was a very holy man.

Almost as if defending the presence of the lama, the nobleman made quite a tale of it, mostly wasted; when F'oung said something about "the golden stream" Bancroft stopped him, asking where this stream was; when the boy said that the *ser ch'u* flowed north of the walled city, and was the place from which the gold for ornaments and utensils was brought, Bancroft showed what was in his mind by asking if this river could be followed and if it led out of Muli by an easier way than that over which he had been brought to the walled city.

"He no say," F'oung said in English.

His reward for the query was to have the Tibetan glance quickly at the king; the lord's thought undoubtedly was that Bancroft was planning escape in case the ruler died; the white man merely wanted to avoid, if possible, the long, dreary, chilly homeward journey.

When the tale came to an involved description of Brgyn-pa's boyhood—the tent he lived in, the food he ate, and how a brother married the wife of another brother, Bancroft suddenly asked the thing he had hoped to have explained—

"Do all famous lamas of the yellow robe have yellow hairs on the backs of their hands?" he asked.

"It is a mark of great distinction," Druk-dra, the nobleman, said gravely. "Only a man marked by the gods can possibly have it."

Whistling softly, Bancroft held out his own hands, palm downward; the Tibetan stared at them.

"Tell him that in my country many men have yellow hair on their hands," Bancroft said. "And on their heads, like mine, when they are not shaved. And, also like I have, on my face."

The thought penetrated slowly and burned down into the Tibetan.

In a tight voice he asked—

"Does the white barbarian want me to believe that he is a favorite of our gods?"

Bancroft quietly answered that he did not.

"Then the white barbarian means—"

Druk-dra did not put it into words, but instead rambled fearsomely into the past history of Brgyn-pa—his boyhood, his manhood, his pilgrimage to Lhasa, his knowledge of the gods . . .

"All of which he told you?" Bancroft asked.

The Tibetan said sharply—

"Brgyn-pa came here alone—" big Dave Bancroft nodded soberly—"and he told us—"

"The story," finished Bancroft.

It took time for Druk-dra of the king's

household to figure it all out. Then, in bewilderment, he said:

"How did the demon tiger put his claws on our king?" and answered the question with, "He must have been an invisible tiger."

"Is that what the lama said?"

"The lama has said nothing of it."

"He will," Bancroft suggested. "And when he does—"

The Tibetan nodded; next he asked—

"Why should any one desire the king's death?"

Bancroft merely shrugged, not knowing the answer.

"Or your own?"

Both looked at the king and needed nothing further. The ruler of the Muli breathed almost naturally.

The lord's lips worked horribly and he made a motion as if to clap his hands; Bancroft stopped him swiftly, saying, through F'oung:

"Wait. There must be more men than one who desire the king's death. To kill only one will be to—to loose the hornets in the beehive."

The Tibetan looked as if he felt capable of killing every priest within the walled city and would do it with pleasure. He controlled his working features with effort, and then, out of sheer amazement and desperation, and as if he in some way entirely beyond him, had violated his trust, said one word—

"Why?"

Bancroft wished that he knew. He said nothing, but, as if he had spoken, F'oung, as interpreter, said in his parrot's voice—

"*Ser ch'u*—the golden stream."

Gold!

V

IT WAS not so simple as that.

As night came noisily to Muli, conches howling and dogs keeping in tune with them, and the sun was blotted out by the violet shadows of the gigantic mountains, Bancroft rolled himself into one of the soft hides and lay where he could watch the king. He had repeated the dose, and been rewarded by the ruler's having opened his eyes—no longer so contracted of pupil—and smiling at the Tibetan lord, as one who said that he felt better and was recovering the desire for life.

No, not so simple.

Gold explained many things in many places, but not the fury of the yellow robed lamas.

Bancroft knew why he had been brought to Muli. He knew now that Druk-dra and the other lords of the king's household had agreed to let the white barbarian be purified by the lamas—a ceremony which would have ended in death at the hands of the hag witch doctor.

There was the possibility that Brgyn-pa, the lama, was a white man, or a half-caste, in perfect masquerade. Yellow hairs did not grow on Oriental hands. Or had the wily priest dyed them in order to acquire merit? However, Bancroft had already put doubt in the nobleman's mind; from now on Brgyn-pa's activities would be curbed. Was the lama the one who had put the powdered opium in the king's food, and not the cook? Was there some sort of ceremony of blessing meat, during which Brgyn-pa placed the drug in the dish? If this were so, a dead cook bore testimony to Bancroft's accusation.

It was hardly a pleasant thought, and the white man forced it from him, composing himself to sleep.

An oil lamp filled with butter was the only light in the king's chamber; the wooden shutters had been closed and heavy curtains drawn over them. Druk-dra, lord of the household, dozed on skins at the foot of the throne, two attendants stupidly stared at nothing, a single red cloaked guard eased his body against the wall where he could see the king.

Bancroft saw no reason why the ruler would not recover, although a day or two more of the poisoning would have put him beyond even the drastic treatment. And then if the lama crew did not start something which the king's household could not cope with, he would be on his way

back to Yunnan—to six months more of research, and then home.

What woke him he never knew. Possibly knowledge that the injections were to be continued throughout the night, possibly something else. Awake he was, and for some reason very cold and alert. Very cold indeed; the skin of his hands were clammy. In that first waking moment the room, so still before, seemed to roar with sound, but as he looked about he saw that the king slept on his bed, the noble slept at the foot, the attendants and guard dozed away—and yet the room *did* roar.

His head, he knew then, was throbbing as if the blood tried to cataract from his eyes and ears, and his heart was racing.

How the room roared with sound! No—it was all within himself, and how terribly cold it was! Hand went to clammy hand, and rested a moment on vein; his heart was no longer racing, but beating slowly—*click, click, click*—as if the organ itself were becoming paralyzed. He felt uncomfortably lax; his muscles were like strips of flabby fat.

Even his head was becoming numbed; why else would he have smelled some delicious sort of fruit—peach, apricot, bitter orange—when the presence of any was impossible?

In some deep corner of his brain memory stirred; he seemed again to be caring for that youngster who was brought to the hospital in the States with tetanus. Poor little kid, better give him amyl nitrate. Don't be afraid, youngster; this will not hurt, and it'll smell like all the fruit you've ever eaten in your life.

Bonds of steel seemed to hold Bancroft to the floor; his relaxed muscles tried to refuse to let a leg, an arm, a finger, move, but, like a drunk in a gutter, the white man rolled and crawled, falling face downward again and again, toward the nearest wall; he clawed down a curtain trying to pull himself erect, and the wooden crossbar holding it clattered down across a table. The room went black—a hot blackness shot through with crimson streaks and stars and zigzag lightning.

The big doctor could not have been sprawled on the floor more than a fraction of a minute, but time no longer meant anything to him. He did not even know that he had lost consciousness as he weaved his body—damn' legs wouldn't hold a fellow!—up along the wall, scratched like a dog at the wooden shutter, found something which protruded, moved something and the shutter swung open.

He could hardly breathe; even the cold outer air did not seem to penetrate his lungs. Nor could he see—not even the hundreds of lamas standing before the king's palace, who stared up at him; who spat upward and screamed—they had been silent before—curses of unbelievably filthy origin. In their midst was Brgyn-pa, but Bancroft did not see him either.

The howls of the lamas awoke the palace; the first soldiers who, following an officer, bowed their way into the king's chamber to report the matter to Druk-dra, became wordless as they saw a room enchanted, lifeless; not until Bancroft's big body swayed, and he would have fallen out of the window into the lamas' arms if the officer had not seized him, did they rush forward and about the chief of the household and their king.

Druk-dra's rubbing hand over his ears was proof that he, also, had been affected, but not nearly so much as Bancroft. Directly before the rugs where the white man slept—if any one had looked there—were tiny particles of glass, in which the drug had been before the little vials were broken under Bancroft's nose. Bancroft would have died; the others in the room, save possibly the weakened king, would have been well stupefied.

What the lord did was the one thing which could have saved the white man.

Before resting, the Tibetan had tied Bancroft's medicine case about his body, so that it was bound on his chest; thong after thong had been knotted tightly, lest by some devil's business the white magician might vanish and take with him the healing fluids. Now Druk-dra cut the

lashings free and pushed the bag, opened, before Bancroft.

Slowly and more slowly the white man's heart beat. In desperation the Tibetan glared at the rows of bottles and shining instruments; there were the hypodermics which were saving the king's life, but no magic was in them. If only the white barbarian would awaken and give himself some of his own magic— But the barbarian, as all could see, lay like a dead man.

F'oung it was—brought sniveling to the room by a half dozen soldiers—who solved the problem.

"When a man is very cold and weak," the Chinese boy said, "my master gives him something which is hot on the tongue and to the belly, and it brings the blood to life."

And so the fact that F'oung began with the largest of the bottles—putting his nose over the opening—and decided that it might be the one, was all that saved Bancroft. And again—in the hands of fools—it was the one thing which could have saved him now: brandy.

If a little might be good, F'oung supposed, much would be better. And so the best antidote for what Bancroft had inhaled was poured down his throat.

LIFE stirred in him at last; his eyes finally reported to his brain what he was seeing—the ring of foreign, frightened faces—and then partial memory flooded through him, brought by a trace of the fruity, poisonous odor remaining in the room. He pointed feebly at the case, and when it was within reach managed to get his hand to it. Brandy—no, all gone! Then—better have something to help the old heart—save that strychnin for the king; didn't know how much the man'd need. Glory, how slowly a fellow's head worked! And then the proper drug—

He was able to sit up.

F'oung, at his command, brought cold water and cloths, and Bancroft bound one, dripping wet, about his head.

Then, with a Tibetan soldier on each side, he staggered over to the king.

The king was breathing a little slowly; an injection was indicated immediately and Bancroft gave it with hands that trembled.

The Tibetan lord now had time to go to the window, to see for himself what the guards had reported.

The space below the palace was as empty and bare as the wind swept summits of the far cold hills.

One of the guards spoke suddenly; what all saw, as he pointed to the floor, made them catch breath. In the light of the butter lamp, and directly before it, was a tiny, malignant faced tiger, molded cleverly out of gold.

While Bancroft stared at the image, the Tibetan lord swooped on it, and with one gesture—before the white man could stop him—hurled the horrible little thing out of the window. Next Druk-dra growled an order, but before the leader of the men could turn Bancroft said, through F'oung:

"Whoever did this had time to go away. But where is the lama who prayed in this room?"

"He says, master," F'oung reported, "that they are going to find the lama, and that he does not care if he is brought here living or—" shuddering—"very unhappily dead."

"Tell him that the lama must be brought here alive," Bancroft said wearily, painfully.

The Tibetan lord nodded understandingly and muttered some words which F'oung translated to be—

"It will be more pleasant to kill the yellow robe slowly."

This was not what Bancroft wanted, but he nodded. Get the lama here and do a bit of talking to him; find out who knew so much about drugs—who had almost killed the white man himself.

Several of the guards remained in the room now, and after another examination of the sleeping king, Bancroft, renewing the compress on his own head, sat down on the rugs.

As he felt an itch on his chest, he in-

voluntarily grinned. Of course there were fleas here; what made him smile was the thought that a fellow could have been so near to dying and still feel annoyance at a flea bite—a little itch—which was of no importance at all. He wondered, curiously, if a bite would bother a fellow waiting to be executed. Just the same, the little animal certainly must have made a good meal from him while he had been unconscious. He hoped some of the poison had been taken by the flea—do the pest good; although this, he knew, was entirely impossible.

A few minutes more, or less lucky accidental treatment by F'oung in giving the brandy, would have finished him. Well—he was not dead. Not yet. And the king would be himself again in forty-eight hours or so; after which, back to Yunnan. Why, in a few months the thing would be just a sort of nightmare of lamas and prayer wheels and nobles and little golden tigers—a story to be told and probably not believed.

He was too weary, too exhausted to care very much about anything, except that damnable flea!

Bancroft stood the little torture for several minutes more, and then opened his clothing. This certainly must have been the king of all fleas; it itched him worse every second. And before the night was over, he would probably be feasted upon by all the other fleas in the palace, until they perforated his hide.

The Tibetans looked at him as he bared his chest and prepared to give himself a delicious raking with his fingers.

He was about to gouge away when the Tibetan lord swiftly picked up the butter lamp and almost ran to him, holding the light before him.

Bancroft, unconsciously, looked down, expecting to find a reddened patch of skin. On his chest, very faint as yet, yellowish and hardly darker than his white chest, was the mark of a tiger's claws.

Bancroft's ejaculation referred to a clawed animal, but not a tiger.

"The rotten, dirty skunk," he said.

So they had marked him for death, had they?

Druk-dra, for all his courage and intelligence, was deeply impressed. F'oung whimpered something involving all the three thousand devils of the three worlds, and in that moment, when every one in the room goggled at the brightening mark on the white man's chest, Bancroft, hands unobserved, reached into his case and fumbled for the unguent he used when he sometimes spattered acids on his fingers in Yunnan. He managed to smear the inside of one palm with a generous gob of the soothing, creamy white paste, and then, grinning despite the burning itch, said to F'oung—and through him to the others—in a loud, compelling voice:

"There is no magician so great as I. Brek-kek-kek-kek and u-rah-rah Wisconsin and Cornell-I-yell-yell-yell-Cornell and watch the greatest magician on earth. I can change little children into cats, mice or dogs, but I am a kind magician and seldom do it. I care nothing for other magicians and their work, but they fear me. Observe! See how powerless their magic is."

He waved his hands over his head, faced the staring Tibetans and said in English:

"Nothing to conceal. The hand is quicker than the eye. If I ever get hold of that lama I'll beat the tar out of him, because I think he's the guy. Watch Bosco the snake eater; he bites off their heads and sucks their blood. A dime! a dime! See the wild llama of the Andes; he pursues the little children on their way to school, steals the butter from the sandwiches in their lunch boxes and greases his feet so he can slide down the mountains. A dime! a dime! Yes, I'll bet that the lama in the yellow robe is the boy, and even if he isn't, a couple of good pokes on the jaw will do him a world of good."

This mighty and terrible incantation sent the Tibetans to their knees, and even Druk-dra looked frightened. It was obvious that the white barbarian was summoning the help of the demons of the lower world; they would not have been

surprised if the Mighty One himself answered the magician's prayer.

Bancroft let out a yell—and the Tibetans bowed clear to the floor—and down came his hands from above his head. Waving one of them in front of his body, he rubbed the other—the paste daubed palm—over the acid etched marking on his chest. How good the soothing unguent felt!

Then he raised both arms again.

"He—he is a great maker of magic," Druk-dra gasped, as he saw the red tiger's mark vanish.

Bancroft, trusting that a few hours would completely erase the acid burns without visible trace, calmly buttoned up his shirt before any of the Tibetans came for a closer look.

VI

IF BANCROFT, cold and still suffering from the numbing after effects of the drug, managed to doze between his fleecy rugs, the head of the king's household must have been busy all of the night. Lamas and villagers were pulled from their beds and questioned; here and there a slitted nose gave painful evidence that some of the men had proved surly. Druk-dra used the one method which had always been successful—torture—but he did not get any information concerning Brgyn-pa, nor find where the yellow robe had gone. When the lamas, at four in the morning, began to collect at the great temple up the hill, noisily, alarmingly, he gave over before their leaders could plan whatever opposition they might have formulated.

Torture he had tried, and to extremes.

When Bancroft saw pale yellow light creep into the room, and the summits of the Snow Range turned opalescent, he rose and washed face and head with icy water; he guessed then how extreme the Tibetan methods had been.

Pariahs carried heavy sacks past the palace and beyond the outer wall of Muli to a bare, rocky spot, dropping their burdens on the stone; before the cloths were yanked away a dark cloud of vultures flapped drearily overhead, swooped down as if unafraid of the pariah corpse carriers and breakfasted.

Disgust must have been in the white man's face, for Druk-dra, red of eye and obviously very tired, said something which F'oung passed on—

"When the bodies are eaten rapidly, the men have been good men."

"You watch to see how soon it is done?" Bancroft asked, since the other seemed to expect him to say something.

"I? The pariahs tell us. Would any of us go to the death place?"

Bancroft did not blame any one who stayed away from it.

The king must have opened his lips and spoken, although the white man did not hear him; Druk-dra ran to his ruler's throne bed and talked so steadily and earnestly—the king listening, and several times replying—that Bancroft at last insisted that it was time for more medicine, lest the feeble king became excited and feverish.

After the ruler had been given a diminished dose by Bancroft, Druk-dra asked—

"Will your great magic take away the mark of the tiger devil on the king's body?"

"It will stop the influence of the devil," Bancroft said wisely, "but the mark itself has been there so long that it will take a strong medicine to remove it. In time, with the medicine, the tiger sign will disappear."

"The king wishes you to tell him how the tiger placed the mark upon him."

"It was not a tiger," Bancroft said.

From that moment the ruler of the Muli began to recover more speedily; men and their tricks he could understand, but while he felt that he had been supernaturally marked for death, he had been entirely willing to die.

What did they do now? Wait? Or would Druk-dra send him back to Yunnan with a guard? Bancroft doubted the latter, until the king was himself and until the need for guards no longer ex-

isted. It probably would be waiting—until some one struck again—at the white man and at the king.

Gulping down buttered tea and doing his best to swallow balls of dry flour, Bancroft asked the big Tibetan lord, through F'oung:

"Is there a time when all of the lamas are in the great temple? Since Brgyn-pa has vanished, why not have soldiers go to the temple, when all are there, and see if he is among them?"

Druk-dra seemed all for the plan, but the king vetoed it; apparently it was against every tradition.

Inaction, and the idea of waiting for a knife in the back, gave Bancroft no enjoyment. No sense in letting the other fellow hammer your line and run the ends; the thing to do was the way old Pop Warner did it—keep the ball yourself and make the other fellow worry on the defensive. But how? If the king would not stand for any kind of attack, and they did not know where the rascally lama was hiding—

Bancroft said suddenly:

"Have the soldiers searched the place of the dead? The lama may be there."

"They would not go if I ordered it," the nobleman answered. "If they did, we could only make pariahs of them. And Brgyn-pa could not go where the vile birds eat and remain a lama."

The king whispered something, and Druk-dra replied; F'oung said to Bancroft:

"It is a day of many devils, Master. Up in the temple they will pray until the sun is very high. When the lamas finish their devotions, friends of the king among them will return here and tell us what they do and whether the evil yellow robe was there, and—"

He stopped as one of the red cloaked guards opened the door; in, one after the other, like ancient ducks, waddled the five old priests.

Tears streaked their grimy faces. The robe of one was half torn from his body; dark spots appeared on their clothing, as if many men had spat at them.

Even while their leader, head to the floor, choked out his story, F'oung said in a squeaky voice to Bancroft:

"I was wrong, Master. We will not be told what is being done, nor if Brgyn-pa is hidden in the great temple."

Bancroft had guessed as much.

The ancient priest was continuing his sorry tale, but Druk-dra, grim eyed, went to the window and looked out. He could have seen nothing—far mountains, empty roads, bare burial place—save for white bones shining in the sun. At last he pleaded with the king to surround the temple, but the ruler of the Muli only said that two wrongs would not right the single injustice of the lamas in throwing the most holy priests from the temple.

"If some pilgrims would come," Druk-dra said, "I would put on sacred clothing and enter the temple with them and perhaps go unnoticed."

He said it so earnestly that Bancroft asked F'oung to interpret.

"Tell him I'll go with him," the white man said.

MINUTES passed in argument. It was impossible, even if the white barbarian was disguised, and Druk-dra—doing the talking—said that he was a lama from beyond Lhasa and spoke a different language. Even the king objected; did Druk-dra intend turning the white magician over to the priests, after he had saved the king's own life? Druk-dra growled a negative. Nevertheless, he insisted, such a venture—much as they desired to find out what was going to happen—could only end at the place of death where the birds picked your bones.

"Ask him if he is afraid to go," Bancroft told F'oung.

"If I say that, master, he will—"

"Ask him!"

The Tibetan lord glared at the white doctor a moment and then he began to grin.

"We go," he said calmly.

Bancroft shaved rapidly, while Druk-dra issued many orders; when he had

finished, and had doused his face with diluted alcohol, Tibetans took butter into which dirt was mixed and rubbed it over his hands, arms, neck and face. Over this they put another layer of dust, patting it on the buttery base with their palms. His eyebrows they painted with black ink, and Druk-dra, changing his uniform for a yellow robe—brown with dirt and age—warned him not to open his sky colored eyes wide, lest some one see.

"He must be a speechless *k'anpo*," the king ordered. "Very learned, but unable to open his lips."

A tight hat was fitted over Bancroft's light hair; clothing was brought, and Tibetans helped him dress, in proper fashion. At last a soldier brought a piece of polished steel and Bancroft looked at himself.

In place of a yellow robe he had been given a dirty sheepskin gown, which was pulled up to the knee and showed a bit of red silk beneath; his boots were fastened about his thighs; he was belted with red painted rawhide, and in the belt was a short straight sword. About his neck hung prayer beads of silver and turquoise, and silver filagree charm boxes. Over the tight cap Druk-dra himself adjusted a big, clumsy fox skin turban. A soldier brought earrings, and Druk-dra severed one of the circles and pulled it a trifle apart, placing it so that it hung from the white man's left ear.

"If his blue eyes are not seen" the king said more cheerfully, "he looks like a savage lama from some far country."

F'oung relayed final instructions:

"If the lord leans against you when some one is talking, it means that you are to hide your tongue against the top of your mouth and then open your lips, so any one can see that you can not speak. If he places his hand against you, you must put your own on your charm box—the largest one—and act as if you prayed. And here is the drum; whenever Druk-dra turns his, you are to do the same— O, master, I say goodby to you, and I will die in this place also after you have been killed."

Bancroft made a guttural noise, as the dumb do, and even the terrified F'oung was partially reassured.

The lord himself was ready; robe and peaked hat made a different man of him, and only one acquainted with the noble might have recognized him. Brgyn-pa would, but neither Bancroft nor Druk-dra expected to see that lama save at a distance.

Druk-dra said to the five ancients—

"Pray for us."

They did not wait for the pair to depart, but went to work at once.

Instead of going along the palace front and to the first cobbled street, Druk-dra, after glancing carefully about, clambered over the stone wall; Bancroft, unaccustomed to the soft soled boots, followed more easily than he had thought possible. They went on hands and knees until they came to a big rock beside a path, and then—the white man following the Tibetan's example—rose to their feet and shuffled forward toward the gate as if very tired.

No red cloaked soldier stood there, but several lamas questioned them. Druk-dra did the talking, and Bancroft opened his mouth and went "*gaaaaa*" at the appointed time.

The disguised Tibetan lord seemed disturbed at whatever the lamas had told him, and he began to walk more rapidly along the deserted ways. Even the villagers were out of sight, and the walled city of Muli, save for the blowing of conches at the temple, was very still.

From now until they returned to the palace, Bancroft was, he knew, unable to ask a question or to understand a single word which might be spoken. His was the part of a man whose face none knew—Druk-dra's double disguise, and the excuse for the Tibetan to get inside the temple and past the watchful priests. All eyes would be on the uncouth "pilgrim" from a far land. Even while the lamas at the gate had questioned Druk-dra, their eyes had been on the wild figure of the white man.

What they had said—what disturbed

the nobleman—was that his brother who could not speak must be a very holy man to have come so far, but what he would hear and see at the temple would recompense him for his journey.

Bancroft was beginning to wish that he had had sense enough to stay in the palace as they strode up the hill toward the temple, but when excited voices reached him and drums beat and horns brayed, he forgot all about caution; so much so that Druk-dra squinted, and then pointed to the white man's eyes, and Bancroft let the lids droop again.

Would they discover, in a few moments, who wanted to kill the king, to kill Bancroft himself? What the tiger mark meant? Who knew too confoundedly much about the action of drugs? Even if they heard, Bancroft himself would not know until they were in the palace again. The thing for him to do was to keep his head down. If the lamas found him out—

THE LAMAS—a dozen of them—at the door of the temple questioned them all at once; Druk-dra replied more gutturally than his ordinary tones, and pointed to his stony faced companion. Bancroft again solemnly went, "*gaaa!*" and opened his mouth wide, tongue against the roof.

And they were inside the temple.

Row upon row of yellow robed lamas, kneeling on cushions; before each row were long, narrow wooden stands on which sacred books had been opened. Light filtered in from apertures barred by red lacquered screens; the paintings on the walls below took on a crimson cast, so that placid and beneficent gods assumed the appearance of demons of hell. The ceiling rested on pillars bound about with magnificent Ning-hs'iang rugs, the yellow of which the light turned sanguine, the blue livid.

Druk-dra found a vacant place as near the door as possible, and Bancroft knelt beside him at once, peering into the book before him as if deep in devotion.

Nothing exciting yet. The lamas mumbled their prayers, some between mouthfuls of barley flour, or talked with their neighbors. Here and there ragged attendants hurried about with copper pots filled with hot buttered tea.

Bancroft amused himself contentedly, dropping his eyes whenever the Tibetan on his left shouted a question across him to Druk-dra, by examining the image set on a low platform, in front of which innumerable butter lamps flared—lamps made of solid gold. They were getting away with it! Before long something would happen, and Druk-dra would get a few more pieces of the puzzle. The job had been to get in; leaving, they would have lamas scurrying ahead and behind them, and it would be a cinch.

Kindly looking image, that on the platform! Veiled eyes, placid mouth, unruffled draperies. Some sort of flower in the left hand—lotus, perhaps. And what a color it had, all ruddy gold. Bancroft wondered if the thing were solid. If it were, how many thousands it must be worth! The left hand was extended, as if offering the lovely blossom to the lamas who worshipped the idol; the right was held forth also, but—

Bancroft's eyes, wider than they should have been, examined the left hand again, carefully. A hand; no doubt about it. Slender fingers holding the lotus gently. But the right hand—it was not a hand at all, but the foot of a tiger.

How might he convey what he had seen to his companion? Was this some new image? Even if it were, would not the members of the king's household have connected the tiger claws on any idol in Muli with the marks on the king's chest?

Bancroft went through a long pantomime: he touched his left hand and then his right, after attracting Druk-dra's attention, and then bowed his head toward the image. For an instant Bancroft saw the Tibetan's eyes blaze into his, as if the other already understood, and then Druk-dra touched him, and Bancroft seized his charm box, bobbed his head as he had seen the lamas do, and mumbled gibberish in his throat.

The Tibetan lord must have been

learning things, for several times he would bend toward the lama beside him and ask a question—praying whenever the priest had answered him.

More tea, more prayers, and then a lama in yellow robe and butterfly winged yellow cap knelt before the image and began to pray fervently, loudly; the thousand lamas in the room dropped skull drums and tea bowls and accompanied him eagerly.

"A something—" the lama beside Druk-dra whispered—"a something is going to happen. We have been promised it and we will see. You are lucky to arrive this day; perhaps the tongueless *k'anpo* received a mystical message from the gods!"

The lamas knew that something would happen, and Bancroft, feeling the crowd become electric, knew it also. He closed his eyes tighter and, head bowed, peered up at the tiger clawed idol of gold.

Who would ever believe him when he told the story? If they ever found him out—a thousand wild lamas on one side, and a Tibetan noble and a lone white man on the other—there would not be any bones for the vultures to pick.

The stage was well set; the praying lama whipped up the fervor of his yellow robed brethren to fever pitch, and then Brgyn-pa, still in old, faded silk, stalked from behind a curtain in the rear of the temple.

The lamas' breaths came faster; Druk-dra bit his lip once; Bancroft moved no muscle.

The giant yellow robe bowed once to the idol, and then, stooping, picked up a butter lamp and placed it on the outstretched right hand—on the paw. He bowed to this also, and then, erect, with his back to the lamas, shouted sometiger very loudly—something which tensed Druk-dra's muscles for a moment; the next instant Brgyn-pa waved his hand over the butter lamp and a yellow flame shot high into the air.

Not a lama had his head an inch from the floor before him.

The flame died down immediately, and when heads began to rise timidly, all could see that it was only a sputtering lamp filled with butter.

A second time Brgyn-pa spoke, this time, although to the image, obviously in words which were intended for the lamas, for they stirred and muttered; one, near Bancroft, began to froth a little at the mouth.

A second time the giant lama waved his hand, and again yellow flame spurted; when heads began to rise, all saw that before the idol squatted a cat-like figure—the hideous female witch doctor. The illusion, even to scoffing Bancroft, was well nigh perfect. A flash of fire, a little cloud of smoke, and a terrible creature wafted down out of the air. A veritable demon. To make the picture more complete, the tiger robed hag hissed and spat like a cat.

BRGYN-PA screamed a question at her; again the nobleman beside Bancroft tightened his muscles, and a wind seemed to ruffle through the rows of lamas. The awful hag screamed an answer like nothing human, and a third time Brgyn-pa passed his hand over the butter lamp, and the sacred yellow flame shot high—clear to the ornamented rafters of the temple.

He had them in his hand after that.

Whatever he was saying must have meant much to Druk-dra, for the head of the king's household was growing more and more ill at ease; once he turned, and Bancroft believed that the door must have been shut on them, for he felt that otherwise Druk-dra would have tried to leave the temple.

Higher and higher the lama's great voice rose, until it filled the big room, and echoed back until it sounded like thunder in the hills. He had the lamas with him; there was no doubt about it at all. Here and there one would rise in his place and twirl his skull drum; others shouted wild words; the man who had frothed at the mouth lay in a fit.

Even without the yellow fire, Bancroft felt, it would be a good show. Brgyn-pa,

with his back toward the audience when he addressed the tiger clawed image, was able to sprinkle his powder on the lamp without difficulty.

The lama was reaching the peak of his harangue. He bent now and plucked several yellow hairs from the tiger skin covering the hag, and held them for all to see; then, pulling one sleeve back with the other hand, he held the hairs against his grimy skin—yellow hair of tiger, yellow hair of man.

While they stared at the blond hairs on the lama's arm, Bancroft saw the fellow slip his hand into his robe and work it swiftly behind him. Over the butter lamp held by the tiger claws of the image.

Red flames, universal symbol of the underworld and of the devil, sent the lamas praying with more fervor than they had ever prayed in their lives. Not a head came up until the bloody hue had vanished.

Whatever Brgyn-pa had said—whatever he might have asked for—would never be refused now! He was—as any reasonable man with eyes could see—the devil himself; or at least the terrible, unsatiable yellow tiger who is the devil's own mouthpiece and servant.

Brgyn-pa's mouth opened wide; he struck an attitude, but never had chance to utter a single word.

The lama sitting beside Bancroft had kept his head down longer than the rest; what might happen to a man—and especially one who had stolen the cap of a young girl, which she must redeem that night—if he actually opened his eyes while the yellow tiger was drinking flame, or flying through the air in smoke with his wife, the devil woman? It was just as well to keep your eyes shut until the fire from hell disappeared and the yellow tiger himself resumed his human form.

The lama shifted his head a little as he waited, and when he felt it must be safe to open his eyes again, they were directed toward Bancroft's hand.

A black hand, a grimy hand, a hand covered with grease; but none of these should have set the yellow robe to quaking.

A little beam of light from the climbing sun touched the back of Bancroft's big hand as it clutched the prayer wheel on his lap. A glitter came from the hairs. Yellowish. Like gold threads. The coating of dirt and grime had clung to the skin well, but the hairs, now, were just as blond as they had ever been.

Before Bancroft knew what was up, the lama managed to shake a sound from his quaking body—no more than a couple of words; before Druk-dra could grab his companion's hands and shove them out of sight, Brgyn-pa had bellowed a command.

For a split second the only sound in the temple was the continual hissing of the hag squatting before the idol. Then an upturned book rack broke the spell; lamas leaped from their cushions, howling; Brgyn-pa was running toward the white man, trying to push his way through the gesticulating throng of priests; Druk-dra had cried something which Bancroft could not understand, and then was yelling as wildly as any of the rest, although he pressed away from Bancroft rather than toward him.

Not until some lama, braver or more frenzied than his brethren, struck at the white man with his skull drum, did Bancroft realize that he had been discovered for what he was.

If the big American had been able to speak Tibetan, or if he had known the import of Brgyn-pa's harangue, he might have confused the lamas by exploiting the blond hair under his cap; as it was only one thing remained for him to do, and he did it without hesitation. He wanted to die on his feet, and since even a hopeless man picks out an objective, his arms flailed out and he managed to force his way a few feet toward a wall. Perhaps he intended to get his back against it, perhaps he may even have had a dim notion of getting up to one of the apertures and so out of the temple, but in another minute he had all he could do to keep the screaming lamas away.

Skull drums were hurled at him by those unfortunates in the rear; no matter how fast he whirled, how savagely he struck out, there were always two or three of the yellow robes clawing at his back, his neck, hitting at his head from behind. All that saved him being instantly bowled over were the prostrate bodies of lamas who had been smashed down by his fierce blows.

Brgyn-pa shouted something—where was the fellow? Bancroft did not see him—and a dozen lamas picked up one of the long book racks and their mates stepped aside to let them come toward the white devil. Bancroft braced himself, decided to rush the oncoming battering ram aimed at him, and at the same moment a lama, behind him, slipped a cloak, or robe, or something stinking with sweat, over his head, and jerked violently. Bancroft, crouched to leap forward, lost balance and the lamas were all over him at once.

Despite Brgyn-pa's shouts, a skull drum hammered down on his head and darkness instantly blotted out the pain.

VII

GUTTURAL English made Bancroft open his eyes, although he had been conscious for some time:

"Come," the creaking voice said, "I have always heard that you Americans have hard heads, and yours was cracked. Awake; I have a few things to ask you."

Bancroft could think of many he himself would like to ask, but he said nothing. Brgyn-pa was seated on a pile of skins; wherever they were was dimly lighted by several fuming butter lamps. In a corner of the place the hag crouched, lapping at something in a bowl.

"You were in Likiang," the man clad as a lama said. "What is the name of the person with whom you lived?"

Bancroft thought this over a moment, fought down desire to press a hand to his aching head, and said quietly:

"Figuring on going there and telling 'em you're a friend of mine? Get my clothes and then get out of the country, eh?"

"An excellent diagnosis, Doctor." The other smiled. "Exactly that. Well, you wanted to see the lama Brgyn-pa—and now you see him. What a fool you were! Do you think I would let you stop the discomfort and labor of years?"

"You might let me go with you," Bancroft said. "If you've accomplished whatever you want, why leave me here?"

"In my stead, Doctor; in my stead! The lamas would never permit me to go otherwise; your being brought here—oh, I had a hand in it, I assure you—was in one way providential, although I do not thank you for making the king well. However, that will be easily remedied. Yes, Doctor, the yellow tiger is going to be killed, since he is a devil, and you are going to be the yellow tiger." Grinning broadly, "It has worked out better than I hoped it might."

Bancroft tried to move, but knew now that he had been well bound.

"I can't afford to take chances, Doctor," his captor said. "It seems curious to be speaking a civilized language again—if English is civilized, which I doubt. It will be better to see a white woman again. Now, I will have a long journey over the hills, but your travels are almost over. All you will need to do is to bare your chest; on my part I will see that the knife is as sharp as any you ever operated with. Can you ask for more?"

Bancroft, eyes on the evil mask before him, said:

"I'd rather live, if you do not mind. Can't you get away with your gold without killing me?"

"You guessed?"

Bancroft did his best to shrug.

"Why else?" he countered.

The false lama settled back on his skins.

"It does no harm to tell you," he said. "There remains time—I am supposed to be talking with my brother, the devil himself—and you will never tell the story. And it is good for me to talk; it will give

me fluency I feared I had forgotten."

Bancroft was more than willing. He did not care what the lama's story might be, but he did feel that perhaps the use of English, of civilized thought, might change this man's point of view; in the end, he might be willing to allow Bancroft to live.

"I was the only doctor in six thousand square miles," the man began, already in boastful tones. "Why was I a doctor in Siberia? My confrere, I guessed wrong; I was high in the Cheka, let me tell you, and I saw death in a thousand forms—and directed some of it. But once, just once, I guessed wrong, and my Red brothers, they did not kill me; but they sent me to the gold concessions. Three hundred paper roubles for me each month, and gold to be had for the stooping—but not for me! I was watched like a laborer!

"Gold—queer stuff, gold. One pictures it as lumps that shine like polished brass, or as handfuls of glittering flakes. But the nuggets were dull surfaced lumps; even after it had been burned out of the quicksilver it was only like dry mustard.

"No prospector could keep more than three pounds of gold a week, and so they smuggled it into China.

"I—well, here and there I collected a little myself, and I gave it all to some Chinese to take me with them back to a land of white women. I knew the Chinese were smuggling gold, and when we passed the border, I had the gold, and the vultures had the Chinese.

"Not much gold; not all I wanted, and not all a woman would want. I am a man of patience, when I know what the goal will be—and I am almost there now, Doctor. Will I be a dispenser of pills, hold the hand of withered women and console them, dig out tonsils? Not I! Paris, Doctor, Paris!

"You wonder how I came to Muli? I heard of it first in a little Chinese hut, where a wandering lama told the story of the city where one ate from gold. I said I had patience? Ha! For two years I studied this language, and then I became a lama and traveled with lamas, and at last I found one who was coming to the walled city beside the golden stream."

"If you come with me," Bancroft said, "there'll be no trouble about passports; we could go from Shanghai to the Islands and you can be an American."

"Money," the Russian said, "is the best passport in the world. No, Doctor, I am afraid that I must leave you here. Now, although I have enjoyed this conversation, I am afraid that the lamas are growing impatient, and as they are to get me out of this place, I do not wish to be discourteous to them. So, if you will kindly strip—and remember that I have a knife in my hand—I will be obliged to you. Do not mind the female animal in the corner; I brought her along to give color to my tale, and she has no more wits than a dead cat. Undress, Doctor; I cut your thongs."

Bancroft sat up. There was nothing else for it, and yet he did not intend to become a sacrifice unless—but what else could he do?

"You can't carry much gold with you," he said quietly, as if impressed by the Russian's story.

"Ten lamas," the Russian ex-doctor said gleefully, "have been detailed to take me almost to Likiang, and they are to be my beasts of burden. Yes, they will carry sacks of gold—pure gold—and leave me with them; and when they return to Muli, they know—for I will tell them—that I have taken the yellow metal to my lord the devil."

"Will the king let you go?" Bancroft asked.

"Off with that shirt," the Russian urged. "The king? The schedule, Doctor, will go forward like clockwork. I needed you badly, and a word in the right quarter had you brought here. You are a magician—you made the king well! Hence, you are a servant of the devil, a yellow tiger, and when you are dead there will be great joy in Muli. The king is just a king. I have seen kings die before, and I will see one die again. I may even kill him myself, when we break into the

palace. And then the lamas will elect their own king, and there will be no laws not to their liking. Come, Doctor, you must strip more rapidly, and then I am going to attire you like a king of beasts."

"I suppose you brought the opium with you, and the colored fire? And—"

"You," the Russian snapped, "are trying to talk against time, Doctor, and I will have no more of it."

He was no longer the suave, pleased man, and Bancroft realized how utterly evil and ruthless the Russian was.

So be it.

If he died, he died in this black pit, and nowhere else.

OFF came Bancroft's shirt, and as the garment dropped to the floor Bancroft drove forward, arms wide.

The Russian's knife point slid through Bancroft's forearm, and as body met body, continued through the upper arm and into the fleshy part just below the shoulder. The hag in the corner gave an unearthly scream at the sight of blood and, almost the same instant that the men battered to the hard rock floor, she was on them, tearing with her claws and biting with jagged fangs at Bancroft's white, unprotected back.

Pain ripped through Bancroft. He was trying to keep his knifed shoulder against the Russian, to keep the other from dragging the blade free; at the same time his lean body shoved the ex-doctor from Siberia along the floor. Bancroft was oblivious to the tearing vampire on his back.

This was a game—the same sort of game as he had played before, but with different stakes. Bancroft did not work blindly. When the Russian's left arm tried for his throat—the right, crushed down, unable to pull out the knife—Bancroft kneed him in the belly; and almost at the same moment brought the top of his head up under the Russian's chin.

Lamps were overturned and the room became dimmer and dimmer, a hell of horror, an impossibility.

Bancroft's head was clear; what he intended was to get his own right arm from under the Russian, and then hammer the fellow into submission, blow on blow; and yet the moment he might cease his hugging the Russian could pull out the knife. Well, why not? Better to die here! And yet conflict made the white man more desirous to live than ever. His head was clear, but he began to feel a fatal weakness creeping up his legs, and even into his right arm. He knew then that he must be losing blood rapidly, although he tried now only to hang on to the man beneath him.

The Russian was working his way from under Bancroft slowly. Agony tugged at the American's body as the withdrawn blade scraped against bone.

How he did it he could never have told, but somehow big Dave Bancroft struggled to his feet. The hellcat's nails were dug deep into his skin, and she was clawed so tightly to him that she remained on his back.

The renegade Russian, dripping knife in hand, leaped up at once; Bancroft faced him, blood staining his bare chest.

He could not stand there long. Things were all weaving around before him; he wanted to smash that leering face just once—he saw it unmasked now.

The Russian bellowed, beside himself with rage that his carefully laid plans were threatened with failure.

"I will kill you with my hands."

"Come—and—do it," Bancroft whispered, forcing his legs to hold him up.

"With my hands! And then show you—the dead yellow tiger—to the priests, and they will cut you into little pieces!"

The regenade Russian doctor did not drop his dripping blade, but poised it for the finishing blow.

It flashed upward, red with blood and yellowed here and there by light from the one remaining lamp; upward, and then red color came between Bancroft and the murderer. Bancroft tried to strike out, the hag spitting in his ear and setting her

teeth in his neck, and then the place—everything he could see—became redder than the color just before his eyes; he spun about once and then the rocky floor rose to meet him. Bancroft had no sensation of hitting anything hard; it was as if the rocks were the softest of fleece.

VIII

THE SOFTEST of fleece!

In a corner of the king's bed chamber the five ancient priests were droning away at their prayers:

"O jewel in the lotus!
Unceasingly, by night and day, our thoughts are fixed upon the Law.
Unceasingly, by night and day, our thoughts are fixed upon the Body.
Unceasingly, by night and day, our minds learn the sweetness of peace.
Unceasingly, by night and day, our minds enjoy the peace of meditation.
O jewel in the lotus!
Om mani padme hum!"

How soft his bed was—

"O Master," F'oung cried in his ear. "Do not die now! There is no longer need to die!"

Bancroft opened his eyes.

The red cloaked noble, Druk-dra, kneeling where he could see the white man, said something quickly; F'oung spoke again.

"He wishes to know, master, if his sin in going to the place of dead is forgiven by the gods."

So that was where the renegade Russian had taken him? Some cavern in the rocks, safe from any one in the walled city.

Bancroft nodded weakly, and then said—

"Ask—how he knew—where I was."

"I have already been told, master. When Druk-dra returned to the palace, the king wished to send all of the soldiers to find you, for Druk-dra knew that you were to be killed from what the yellow robed Brgyn-pa said; Druk-dra said that he knew where you were taken, for you had spoken many times of the place of the dead where the birds feasted. And so he took his sword, and while the priests prayed, he went to look."

It was a long time before Bancroft found sufficient strength to have F'oung bring his case; then he unbound the crude bandages and cleansed his cuts, binding them again with gauze, rollers and adhesive. He made F'oung daub the claw marks of the hag with disinfectant.

An attendant brought a padded red robe, and Bancroft slipped into silks which had never been worn; he drank deeply of water, and then the king said something to his chief nobleman. A narrow stemmed pipe was brought and stuffed with silky tobacco, lighted with a coal and handed to the white man.

His eyes met Druk-dra's; Tibetan and American grinned.

"Boy," Bancroft said in English, "you're nobody's fool."

Guessing what he thought the other said, the Tibetan pointed toward the window, to which Bancroft's back had been turned. Hung from the roof of the palace, so that the body swung gently by its neck before the opening, was the yellow robed lama, Brgyn-pa, dead.

Bancroft stood up shakily and walked to it.

Alcohol would wash the dye stuff from the renegade's evil face—what a magician the Tibetans would think him if he did it.

Glancing down, Bancroft saw many lamas staring up; saw also that the witch woman, standing below, was gabbling horrible prayers and curses, which some lama stilled more gently than Bancroft believed possible. What was the hag's story? Bancroft did not know if he had been told the true one by the Russian. Was she one of those unfortunate girls cursed by a Siberian witch who was thereafter forced to be a witch herself? The thought made Bancroft shudder.

No more magic! No more witchcraft! Better to let the lamas feel that the king and his men had brought about Brgyn-pa's end—much better that way.

For himself, all that he wanted was—

"The king," F'oung said happily, "will

have his soldiers take you to Likiang as soon as you are strong, master. And if you wish some of the yellow metal which the lamas promised Brgyn-pa, it is yours. If—"

"Tell the king that not all white men wish the yellow metal."

Loads of it! The David Bancroft Foundation for Research! The top of his profession—figuring it one way. But ringed in with detail and management and organization, where he wanted his test tubes and microscope and his own kind of experiments and experimenters. Yet a fellow might give the money for welfare work of some kind, and do a lot of good.

A lot of good it would do the Muli lords! Once people found where the gold came from—and he would be forced to tell, he knew—and the walled city would swarm with a gold seeking horde.

But some day they would find out anyhow.

F'oung really settled it for him.

"If you do not want the gold, master, remember that I am a very poor boy, and the ninth child of my father, and that I have suffered much in your behalf, and am a very brave fellow, and if it had not been for me we would both have died several times, and—"

While F'oung built up a lively picture of courage, the king took off his wrist amulet, and Druk-dra snapped it about Bancroft's own, saying something to F'oung while he smiled at the white man.

"The king wishes you to have his chain of gold," F'oung whimpered. "It is very little, master. If we had a mule-load of these golden bowls, when we return to Likiang I could buy me a wife or two, and—"

"You talk too much," Bancroft said. "I'm going to pay you more than you were worth, F'oung, and if you had a wife you'd talk her to death telling how you killed the yellow tiger with your bare hands. I'm a doctor, and I'm going to keep on being one." He said the last to himself as much as to the Chinese youngster.

The king again spoke; F'oung did not interpret his words until Druk-dra poked at him gently.

"The king says that you will be very happy, and that a man can not feast on the yellow metal, although it is pretty to eat from it when the sun shines on the bowl."

Bancroft nodded in sober agreement. He was too weak and weary, too completely satisfied to find himself alive, to be troubled about fabulous amounts of gold; and when Druk-dra adjusted a soft roll of silk under his head he eased his battered body and knifed shoulder as best he could and turned toward the open window.

Not until he was breathing regularly and deeply did an artist priest come close and copy his features on tight drawn fabric. That is why some day white men will wonder how a fair haired, blue eyed god appears in the innermost shrine of the strange walled city, and why, also, the golden image there holds in its right hand —the tiger claws have been replaced by the original thin, delicate fingers—the most curious scepter ever worshipped—a thermometer.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

JUST one more letter to add to the great pile of evidence, pro and con, stacking up in our hectic gun-fanning controversy. I'm afraid we'll have to call a halt pretty soon, otherwise we'll be totally submerged.

East Syracuse, N. Y.

I'm going to spill a few words which have accumulated in my system and have at last reached a boiling point. Have read *Adventure* almost continuously since 1914, whenever I could buy, beg or steal a copy, and have always liked it because of its sanity in regard to the Western stories which you publish from time to time. And especially I find the Camp-Fire's discussions of much interest and pleasure. I occasionally buy one of the so-called Western magazines of the blood and thunder type, but invariably blow up and heave the dam' thing outdoors. 'Cause when some big he-man with hair on his chest proceeds to thumb-fire two .45 Colt simultaneously and plumb riddle a playing card at 60 feet; or shooting silver halves and dollars in the air, as one hero did—threw up six dollars and drew and hit them all before they hit the ground, or shooting a gun out of a man's hand on his draw and only numbing his hand; or shooting down hill 800 yards and hitting a man plumb center— Well, when I assimilate all the above items and about a thousand more brainstorms even more wild and impossible of actual execution, I sure rise up and declare myself.

I've seen a little of this ball of mud, and I'll be severely jigmatized if I've ever seen any of the things ye so-called heroes accomplish daily. Now when I was younger I punched a few cows in Mon-

tana and Wyoming, ditto New Mexico and Arizona, and to the best of my recollection I never saw but one two-gun man. The aforesaid two-gun man was ambidextrous. Could write, shoot, rope or work equally well with either hand, and is the only truly ambidextrous person I ever saw. He was something of a gun crank; had a small trunk full of guns of every kind. And he was sure chain lightning at dragging out his hardware and unloading same. But hell, a man was safe enough 50 feet away. He would have gotten ventilated if George wished to take time and fire alternately, but shooting from his hip, lead was flying in all directions. The guns that he used were all double action, that is, to show off with, but he had others too numerous to mention.

ANOTHER man I knew, a little old dried up, wizened prospector I ran across one time in Arizona. Like our two-gun man, if in a hurry he was not so accurate, though I have seen him on horseback shoot the head off a rattlesnake. The horse was walking and Mr. Snake was coiled and quiet. Never saw him do it but once, so do not know if it was by accident or skill he hit his head. Snake was about 25 feet from him.

He carried a single action .45 Colt, and it was sure a tough looking old cannon, but he could shoot circles around me, and I had D. A. .38 Colt with 5-inch barrel. However, about this fanning, thumbing business, he lost the first two joints on his right forefinger when 14, and as a gun was pretty near a necessity at that time, he had to dope out a new way to shoot. Left-handed was too awkward, and ammunition was scarce as well as money. So he tried cocking his gun and holding down the hammer, and by pressing the stub of his finger to side of trigger he held it back. Would take aim and let his thumb slip off hammer, but sometimes he failed to hold back the trigger and then the gun did not fire, so his next step he said was to tie the trigger back and depend on his thumb. Took a good many years of practice before he was able to fire more than one or two shots accurately, but when I knew him he could sure make his old gun jingle as long as there were cartridges in it.

I SAW him fan the old cannon a few times. He held it across his body, his forearm on top of his belt and the butt of his gun jammed down against his leg and against his hip bone. Twenty or thirty-three feet away could sure enough have perforated a man, but he nor no one else knew where each shot would strike. Used the edge of his left hand to knock the hammer back. This gun had about as easy an action as any I ever saw. Said the way he came to fan a gun was one time when a rock mashed his thumb, and being in Injun country, had to figure out some means of defence. Kind of kept it up as a hobby but had never had occasion he said to put it to use.

Tried both schemes myself but quit in disgust. He had too many years' start on me, and I never could get the knack of holding the gun and getting the hammer back and released without covering a quarter section of hell, so called it off.

A good many years ago (I think it was with Buffalo Bill, or maybe Pawnee Bill) there was a man who with a .22 rifle and an extra long magazine used to shoot the outlines of horse, wolf and buffalo heads, and also an Indian profile with his war bonnet. He had some fancy show monicker, Captain or Scout or something or other, but for some years past I've had an idea it was Donegan Wiggins, though truthfully, I've nothing on which to base my opinion but would like to know if this was so. He also used to do some quite fancy pistol shooting.

Well, I rattled and yammered long enough about nothing. But if you all ever start to let Greenwich Village cowboys fill your pages with six-gun thunder why I shall just gather my old saddle and blankets and sneak away from the Camp-Fire out in the bush where men are still men and not miracle makers.

—ROBERT H. MCDONALD

ANOTHER brief note on turkey calls.

Iron Mountain, Michigan.

One of the men in my gang had Indian blood in his veins.

He could imitate the turkey call perfect. He did it away down in his throat.

Jack was some hunter, and a good rifle shot. He made a wooden turkey call out of a piece of wood, about one inch square and about four inches long. This piece of wood is hollowed out square, the ends about 3/16 of an inch, the sides made very thin and smooth. After it is hollowed out, the edge of the box is rubbed with rosin and a thin piece of the wood is also treated with rosin, then just draw the piece of wood across the top and you can make the best turkey call of any of the calls ever invented, so Jack said, and I think he was right.

Jack told me turkey hunters mistakes is often not in the call, but in the actions of the caller. He should sit in front of the tree, rifle ready, and call about once, then wait. The male turkey is a curious bird, and usually heads for the place the sound comes from. One may just show one of his eyes but he generally advances cautious and carefully and will continue to advance, until he is satisfied about his turkey friend. Now if the hunter makes the slightest move, or as Jack said, if he bats an eyelash, you get no turkey. Just call enough and then quit. Jack of course calling with his throat, had the advantage of the man fiddling with the box, or some other contraption.

—JAMES C. LEY.

"WHO is Redvers?" "Is he a Canadian?" "Is 'Cry Havoc' entirely autobiographical?" These are questions so many of you asked who wrote in to

praise this fine realistic novel. I am glad to say that the author is present at this Camp-Fire to speak for himself:

Orillia, Ontario, Can.

I was born and brought up in Toronto. My father, now retired, was a sergeant of police, and was of English extraction. I was the fourth in a family of twelve and, as I was born during the Boer War, was appropriately named Redvers after the famous General Redvers Buller.

My brothers were well established in business life when the War came, but, forsaking it, they immediately enlisted. Not to be outdone, I also enlisted—but my father and mother in turn enlisted the aid of friends at Ottawa to get me out of the army. I tried several times again, but to no avail, as father used his influence with the authorities. In 1915 the family sent me to a camp in the Parry Sound district, to a lonely island, thinking that by doing so they would stop my enthusiasm for enlisting.

My brothers meanwhile had gone to France and one had been taken prisoner, and the other later given a government position in London in the Pay and Records Office. The same summer a cousin of mine was sent to join me, as he also was attempting to run away and enlist. Still later two more boys joined us, the island becoming a sort of refuge for distracted parents who had boys thus determined.

IN AUGUST we boys made up a gang and rowed to Parry Sound and there attempted to enlist, but were defeated in our efforts. Nothing daunted, we went farther afield and at last landed in the 74th Battalion, Toronto, under Colonel Gooderham. But once more the hand of my father interfered, and I was only allowed to stay when it was promised that I would get no farther than England.

With this promise the distracted parents held a meeting and decided to let us go.

In England we were let off one draft after another, but one day we managed to sneak in and found ourselves in France in June, 1916, immediately after the Battle of Sanctuary Woods. I gained a first hand account of this battle from the remaining survivors of the ill fated 5th C. M. R's, of which General Draper was now in charge. General Draper is now chief of police in Toronto, Canada.

Our parents in Canada were horrified to find their sons in France, and immediately the wires started to work for our removal, back to England and Canada. The telegram ordering us back arrived too late, as I was now wounded on the Somme and back in England. But to my parents I was dead, as they had received notice to that effect from the government. However, I was very much alive, as they learned when I cabled for money to enjoy England with. By the time the famous telegram had reached its destination, I was back in France, immediately after Vimy Ridge, and again got first hand details of the encounter.

I was in France this time until Paschendaele Ridge, when at last the now famous order reached me and I was immediately sent back to Canada. But again I re-enlisted and as I was now the full army age I was sent to Siberia in 1918. My brothers both came home safe and sound after the war, only to find that I was in Siberia. A few days later a hospital train pulled into Toronto, and on board was myself, who had now been to England, France, Belgium, China, Japan, and spent a winter in Russia in my efforts to be in at the finish. This brings me to the spring of 1919.

AFTER convalescing at home and part time in hospital, from the results of fever and starvation in Russia, I started once more into civil life. After little success at various occupations, I gave up business to enter the ministry of the Anglican Church, and took my high school, matriculation and university course within four years, and was ordained in the ministry. Two years later I was in charge of St. Nicholas Church, Vancouver. B. C., but gave that up after fifteen months to go back to the prairies of Saskatchewan. Later I was called to Medicine Hat, Alberta.

"Cry Havoc!" was written while convalescing from an attack of bronchitis. I wrote the whole story in seven weeks and sent it off. It was turned down by several publishers here and in the United States, but at last it reached the MacMillan Publishing Co., in Toronto. Mr. Hugh Eayers, the president, saw in it something the others had missed and with great care advised me as a budding author.

Very little of the war experiences of *Lionel Thor*, the hero of "Cry Havoc" are part of my actual experience. However, I have a bayonet wound in the hand, and I admit that the black eye episode in the story is also a part of my actual experience while hunting souvenirs. I have simply taken the general Canadian army characters and based my own characters upon them.

My service in France covered a period of eighteen months, and in Siberia six months, serving in France in the Battles of the Somme, Vimy, Chemical Works, Hill 70 and Paschendaele Ridge, being wounded on the Somme. I was not in Sanctuary Woods and arrived on the scene only at the latter stages of the battle. —W. REDVERS DENT.

A READER tells us a little about "varmints" down Texas way.

San Antonio, Texas.

Have been quite interested in noting questions and answers relative to poisonous snakes, scorpions, etc., appearing in *Adventure* at various times. Having traveled the entire State, and done considerable hunting in each section, and being naturally interested in "varmints," I have learned a bit about them.

In your issue of Jan. 1st a reader asked about the "vinegaroon." In reply Mr. Lutz speaks of this

creature as of a centipede or other harmless species. There is a sort of scorpion, resembling a dragon-fly in some respects, but more nearly like the "devil's darning needle," which is found usually on stagnant water in the arid regions of this State; and he is a dangerous customer. I know of one person whose life hung in the balance after being struck by one. This party was an adult, born and raised on a cattle ranch, so you may judge from that fact that she was not exactly a weakling.

There may be other varieties which are harmless, but even the old-timers in west Texas speak in respectful tones of this "vinegaroon" they know.

Concerning scorpions: Of these also there are various types and some no doubt dangerous. A child of six years struck in the left arm by a full grown scorpion during August of this past year died inside of ten hours. I have talked to at least a dozen persons who have not been seriously concerned at a similar injury. I was struck just above my boot top, the stinger barely piercing my leg, and the only ill effects I noticed was from my breeches rubbing against the sore and infecting it slightly. This was one of the small green scorpions in the bayous of Louisiana.

SNAKES of all four poisonous varieties are to be found near San Antonio, and are a source of worry to the newcomers only; altho the old-timers are not taking chances with them by any means. The snake serums on the market at present are all right as far as they go, but in this country the old suction treatment is still considered safest. Mexican snake hunters invariably use this method, cutting a cross about one quarter inch deep, and suck out the poison. There is much talk about the poison infecting bad teeth, etc., but the medical authorities say not.

The venom of either rattler in this country (Diamond-back or Banded) is practically the same; and is not very readily absorbed by the blood. That is the only reason any one ever recovers from snake bite; for if one gets a full shot of venom during the hot weather and their blood resistance is low, they usually die very quickly, as records in the hospitals show. Taken all around, the rattler is the least dangerous of our poisonous snakes except when shedding, at which time he is blind. That does not mean that he's helpless however, for he can strike almost as accurately then as when he can see. This I found out only recently, and aged considerably at that event, for he missed my leg by inches. Said specimen measured 5'2", had 12 rattles and three sets of fangs. When coiled, rattlers make a good target, and one can easily break their back with a pistol bullet from a safe distance.

In my opinion the cotton-mouth moccasin is our worst variety. He is deadly, silent, and may be found most any place, consequently boots are not adequate protection. In the bayous of Louisiana he is found in great numbers, and is a real menace.

The venom of the copperhead is considered the least dangerous of the four kinds, and the coral snake has the most dangerous dose of all. Fortunately, however, he is small, and his mouth cannot grasp the broad surfaces of the body as can the others. They tell me he makes a good pet but I have no inclination to try him out. —TEXAS.

I DON'T know when I've read a more fascinating account of the genesis of one of our stories than this one by Allan Vaughan Elston. His letter is in reply to exceptions taken to some of the things he said in "Mystery Mountain" by Comrade J. S. Miller of Milwaukee, Wis. The author takes up the points in order.

Hollywood, Cal.

The editor of *Adventure* has forwarded me your criticism of "Mystery Mountain."

Your most startling objection is to my assertion: "Trees grow upward from the top, the trunk diameter increases, but a given horizontal bough remains the same distance from the ground."

You word your objection as follows: "No. Ask any botanist or nurseryman. Also use common sense. If trees did not lengthen between limbs, or between the ground and any limb, the lower limbs of *all* forest trees would nearly sweep the ground."

Hark my response: Yes. We can not only ask *any* botanist or nurseryman, but we can ask *all* botanists, *all* nurserymen, *all* forest rangers and every layman in whose back yard still stands the tree from whose lower limb he skinned the cat in boyhood, and they will tell us that if we drive a nail in a tree trunk three feet from the ground, we can return in fifteen years and find the nail still exactly three feet from the ground.

You suggest also that we use common sense. Very well. The first thing common sense tells us is that there's a reason why we do not see, as we travel about the country, hundreds of farm gates swinging thirty feet in the air like flags from masts. Many early settlers chose a tree for a gate post, thirty to sixty years ago. By your theory you wouldn't need to open these gates now. You could drive under them, the gate arching the road at a ridiculous height. As a matter of fact we still have to open these gates. They are still flush with the ground, although the tree itself may be twice or thrice its original height, and although the bole diameter may be so enlarged that the hoops originally used for hinges may be completely buried under the bark.

Before I was a writer, I was a surveyor. On numerous occasions I had to seek witness trees, trees blazed by the early government surveyors who sectionized the land. These blazes are exactly the same height from the ground now as they were when originally hacked, thirty to eighty years ago.

You say that if these things were true, then the lower limbs of all forest trees would sweep the ground. No. The Creator of all the three kingdoms

of earth did not want the lower limbs of forest trees to sweep the ground. So it is that trees, like you and me and the cattle who must move about freely beneath their boughs, are fearfully and wonderfully made. Trees are divinely inspired to serve and to shelter the kingdom of animals. Thus they shed their lower limbs, during growth, as a deer sheds its horns. Each shedding leaves a knot. That is why the clear lumber we get from the butt of a tree is near the outside, never at the heart.

YOU object, again, to the pine cone in the bell. "Holy suffering Blank!" you exclaim, "are we to swallow that?"

No, I do not expect you to swallow the pine cone, but if you did you would find that its shaggy corrugations made it peculiarly competent to stick fast in any orifice where you forcefully wedged it. Wedged firmly into a bell, no wind would blow it out. The clapper of the bell would act as an efficient lock to hold these spines which had been squeezed past it. Thus you would have both and all of the only two machines man has ever employed, the lever and the inclined plane, acting to retain the cone within the hollow of the bell. As for shrinking, the pine cone is very tough and lasting. They are often strung for festoons and ornaments, put aside and used again year after year; they do not shrink, evaporate or wither away any more than a string of wooden beads.

About the rotting of the thong—your thought that the growth of the bough would burst it. (My buckskin cord, by the way, was green).

LET me recite the genesis of "Mystery Mountain." I was seated last spring in my studio at Colorado Springs. A visitor dropped in. He was Andy Adams, an elderly though vigorous gentleman who fifty years ago rode the trails from Texas to Dodge City many, many times behind vast herds of cattle, and who twenty-five years ago wrote a book called the "Log of a Cowboy," an outstanding Western classic.

"Andy," I said, "I crave to write a story called 'Mystery Mountain', but I'm dumb. I crave to hear some eerie, mysterious voice in a mountain wilderness, like a bell, but all I can hear is that Stop and Go bell out in the street. Give me a break, Andy."

"Well," he said dreamily, "I once heard a bell in a mountain wilderness. It was forty years ago. It had me mystified for a long time, until I finally found it. The bell was hanging by a strap from an aspen limb, had been hanging there so long that the bark had grown entirely around the strap. On the ground below was the skeleton of a sheep. I immediately doped out the reason. Some sheepherder found his bell-ewe dead. To salvage the bell, he took it from the dead sheep's neck and hung it on a limb, intending to come back for it. He forgot to come back."

"Fine, Andy. But I can't hang a mystery on the murder of a sheep, so we'll make it the skeleton of a man."

That was as far as I got. A week later Andy Adams dropped in again and asked me how I was getting along with the bell story. "At my rate a word I haven't made lunch money," I told him.

"Boy," he advised, "you're too close to those pesky Stop and Go traffic bells. Lock up this smoke-befogged dive of yours and get out in the woods. Go fishing."

SO I WENT fishing. Alone. I'd heard of a mysterious lost creek which disappeared in the gravel, high up in a certain forest reserve. I drove by night over the roughest kind of a stump and boulder strewn road until I came to a three thousand acre pasture fenced off for elk. That is, stocked with elk for dudes to pot at so much an elk. At that time the elk ranch house was without tenant, although there were elk in the pasture.

It was the end of a trail. I parked my car, made a pack and at dawn started hiking toward the top of a densely timbered mountain. I walked six hours, without seeing fence, roof or footprint. By noon and by luck I stumbled on my goal, the lost creek. On its bank there was an ancient, deserted log cabin.

I followed down the creek for hours, fishing. The creek was brushy and fell through a cascade a mile long and as steep as stairs. I cached my lunch and then could not find it. I fell in the creek a dozen times. But I filled my creel with trout. No food all day; late in the afternoon I started back toward my car. In folly I tried a short cut across the mountains. I climbed two thousand feet and dropped fifteen hundred. I climbed another two thousand feet and dropped another fifteen hundred. It was cloudy—no sun to dry my wet matches. The altitude was about ten thousand above sea level. A third mountain walled me off from my chosen direction. I climbed it, painfully, after dark. It took me till midnight. When I reached its summit, I knew I was lost. It began to rain. I suppose I was very near collapse, chilled, my feet bruised and my hands bleeding from sharp stones by which I had let myself down the façades of cliffs. I had been walking steadily for twenty hours, on outrageous footing, without food.

My brain was being fed, however, on a wealth of mystic material for "Mystery Mountain." On this I feasted as I stumbled onward, groping physically through a pitch black night marked only by the white ghosts of the aspens, groping mentally onward toward a ruse of fiction by which I might transport a legion of other men here to the awful majesty of this mountain night. I was afraid to lie down, although a score of times I stumbled prone, scratching my face on rocks and pine cones. I threw away nine of the ten pounds of trout in my creel, to shed their weight. My brain became feverish and suddenly, jumbled as it was with conjured detonations of a ringing bell, I thought I heard a bell actually ringing.

I HALTED, listened, and again I heard far away in the night a deep, mellow resonance of sound. It was not a bell. It was a voice of awful mystery and for a long time it baffled me

Finally I knew it. It was the bugle of an elk.

It told me the direction of that elk pasture in which I had parked my car. I turned ninety degrees from a mischosen course, followed the voice of the bugling elk until I came to an eleven-wire elk-proof fence, followed this fence to my car, drove almost asleep thirty miles to the nearest lunch counter.

All next week I was laid up. Andy Adams came to see me. "Boy," he commented, when I'd described my excursion, "I know that creek. I bached in an old cabin up there one summer, and wrote a book. You'd ought to have hiked in from the lower end, through Dead Man's Canyon."

"Dead Man's Canyon?" I prompted.

"Sure. There's a grave up in there, under a tree. Nobody knows—"

"Why the devil," I interrupted, "didn't you tell me that in the first place? Say no more. The story's done."

I have recited this to you, Mr. Miller, to show you how closely my yarn was linked, after all, to realities of life, and in the hope that I may enlist you as a friendly reader of my future work. I stand pat on "Mystery Mountain," because it was first sweat in blood and then writ in ink. At the same time the candor of your comment is valued, and I hope to please you better at our next contact in *Adventure*. ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

WHICH only goes to prove once again that a little jigger as seemingly harmless as a comma can rear up and prove mighty troublesome when slighted. In this case, whether the error was the proofreader's or Comrade Stebbings, we'll lay it to the former. At least Comrade Stebbings *knew* better.

Freeport, Ill.

Just dug up the Dec. 15 number of *Adventure*, and found what Cutsforth is complaining about in his letter in Feb. 15th. About "Wild Bill" Cody, as he writes it. I see that in my letter I named in order: "Wild Bill, Cody, Bogardus, Hamilton and that bunch."

I see that in the printed letter the comma between the names Wild Bill and Cody has been omitted. It might easily have been that it was omitted in my letter. I did not retain a copy as it was an offhand thing sort of "signed but unread," you know. However I see no quotation marks about the Wild Bill, as Mr. C has them, and had he quoted the entire line I believe most folks would have seen that it was merely a typographical omission on the part of somebody.

I don't mind being shot at for cause, but in view of the fact that *Adventure* has an acclaimed eradicator I'm just a wondering if it might not have worked overtime and eradicated that durn comma.

My old friend, Bill Wells, now of Sisters, Oregon, is not a "vile creature." He's a mighty fine man and always has been. Ran a ranch on the Green River and was for a time a U. S. Marshal. Billy claims that he fanned his gun and so did a number of his acquaintances of the Seventies and Eighties and I believe him while at the same time arguing that he and they were "jug-heads" for altering their guns as he describes and practising this fanning stuff. I think I can show any man it was not very practical, and when pinned down even Billy says, "It was good only for short distances."

THAT the practise was not as general, as many stories lead us to believe, is borne out not only by my own observations but by the evidence that already several collections of "historical," Western used revolvers show no such alterations as is usually attributed to revolvers altered especially for fanning.

As for "Buffalo Bill" Cody being a killer of men, he did do something along that line but never was considered as a killer; while "Wild Bill" has been, by many writers, considered "Grand Champean." I have some very good reasons however for doubting that he "killed two men for every year of his life (39 years) not including Indians." That he killed a-plenty, we will concede, but there's pretty good evidence still living that in the McCandlas misunderstanding he killed but two men, while many historians claim ten. If we will take into consideration Bill was not a "bad man," in the Western understanding of that term, and that he was for a time in the show business and was "press-agented" so highly that he, himself, became disgusted and quit the game, I think Bill would be just as well satisfied if we would discount his known tally of killings somewhat.

I believe I am about the last person on earth to wish to detract from the fame of any old-timer, but at the same time I think I know old-timers well enough to contend that none of them want any fame as killers and certainly not any more than they have to admit. The West did have its romances, its adventures, its fighting and killings and necktie parties. And I for one, medium old-timer, see no necessity for enlarging on everything to make it more interesting and thrilling. Many of us believe that overdrawing in fact detracts from, rather than heightens interest, and throws the whole thing into realms of fairy stories. I find many of the younger readers beginning to question if there ever was such a place. —"COTEAU" GENE STEBBINGS.

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

South America

A LOOK at the map of an entire continent, keeping in mind the spots where an American would be most likely to find a job.

Request:—"About two years ago you wrote me a very interesting letter on South America. Since that time I have been studying the Spanish language.

The first thing I would like to know is what is the best time of year to hit for South America?

Now I would like to have your opinion on the best place to start for. I would like to go to Rio, but don't imagine that that is the best place to go.

I have no particular trade but have a fairly good general business experience, so am not looking for any particular line of work.

Any advice you give me as to where to go and what business outfits to hit when I start looking for a job will be appreciated."

—HARRY H. DRESSER, Portland, Maine.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—If you and I were sitting looking at a map of S. A. I could point out scores of spots where something is going on that would offer a chance for an American to catch on. Without the map, except a mental one, I will take a few jabs.

North Coast, around Lake Maracaibo, a dozen or more oil companies with numbers of roughneck and office jobs. Also the Barber Asphalt Co. with their pitch lake similar to the one at Trinidad. The United Fruit Co. with a number of plantations. Up the Magdalena River at Barranca Bermeja. The Tropical Oil Co., which is drilling and pumping and pipelining oil to the coast. Up in Colombia several gold dredging outfits and platinum mines. A friend of mine is trying to get his mine to going at El Bordo and making fair success of it. Some work going on by an American company at the mouth of the Magdalena which is about finished. A railroad job or two going on in Colombia.

East Coast. I wouldn't advise a man hanging about either that portion or up the Amazon. She is *no bueno* for a gringo, or as the Brazilians say it, *no bom.* On down further Rio is a good city of over a million with one big American syndicate going strong. This is the Rio de Janeiro Light and Power Co. which controls the lighting, both electric and gas, the telephones, etc., of the city. They pay good money when they need a man in their line. They also have subs in São Paulo and other cities. Down in the southern part of Brazil is an American lumber company which offers a chance for a man who knows that line. This is the Southern Brazil Lumber Co. at Tres Barros, Parana. It is also a subsidiary of the Light and Power of Rio. On down in Uruguay there is a chance for a real cattleman, or for a real meat packer.

Across the River into Argentine. There are too many English there to make salaries as good as they are in Brazil. These are working as clerks and mechanical engineers as a rule. The best paying jobs in Argentine are the ones they can't work. This includes the engineering of high power, high speed threshers. These jobs pay up to $1,000 a month and bonus of 10 cents a hundred pounds for wheat threshed. Also several big American packing houses here too. Not much doing in little Paraguay. In Chile *bastante.* Southern part packing plants for beef and mutton. I will list the opportunities up the line in the next paragraph.

West Coast. Best place to work due to healthiness of climate and most places to find employment. Chile has scores of nitrate "*oficinas*" or plants where salitre is mined from the top of the ground and made into nitrate of soda. Also two of the largest copper mines in the world at Rancagua and Chuquicamata. Two big American importing houses with a score of branches each. Peru has a big copper outfit at Cerro de Pasco and one at Trujillo and quite a

number of other places where a man can get a job. Bolivia is full of mining companies with tin predominating.

In Ecuador there are a couple of gold mines (small ones) that have been producing for years. Also a railroad that most of us have worked for. A Light and Power Co. in Quito that sometimes has a job. Colombia produces gold to the amount of half a million dollars' worth a month, the bulk of the world's supply of emeralds, and also platinum.

You can go to South America any time. They keep going all the year. It is just the opposite season from here and is getting fall there now. Mid-December is the middle of summer in Rio. There is a bit of rain there in mid-winter (August) but you would not mind it, not so much as the winters up here. There is plenty of money in Rio and lots of business. As you state you have no trade it might be you could make out in Rio or B. A. with some American house. I always found it, however, better in the camps, such as mining and oil camps.

Archery

RECOMMENDED books and bows.

Request:—"I would like to have you send me the titles of one or two good books on archery. I would like to have the books to help me select a good bow for general use—target shooting and small game.

I am without experience in archery and would like a book that tells how to use the equipment and also how to make it.

What would be about the right price to pay for the bow without the other equipment?"

—TOD MASTERS, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. Earl B. Powell:—In reply to your letter inquiring about good books on archery, will refer you to "Archery" by Robert P. Elmer (price $5) which you can get by writing to Archery Books, 230 S. 19th St., Harrisburg, Pa., and to "Modern Archery" by A. W. Lambert, 5569 Delmar Ave., St. Louis, Mo. I am getting out a book especially designed to meet the needs of the beginner, to be sold at a low price, but it is as yet in the hands of the publishers.

As to prices on bows, will say that they sell from $5.00 to $100.00 and sometimes up to $200.00. However, you can get a good Lemonwood bow for about $6 to $10, and it is good enough for a champion. This wood comes from Cuba, and is known as *degame,* Lemonwood being a trade name. The most durable American wood is Osage Orange, also known as Bois d'Arc, and bows of this wood sell sometimes for over $100.00. The nicest bow to shoot is yew, but it is too easily scratched up and too much affected by changes of temperature to stand all round use. If a man could get a wood as easy to work as Lemonwood, as nice to shoot as yew and as durable as Osage Orange, it would be ideal.

Railroad

A YEAR ago steel reached Churchill, Manitoba; and the Hudson Bay Railroad, child of the Canadian National, is now an important factor in the development of Western Canada.

Request:—"I am taking the privilege of asking a few questions concerning the Hudson Bay Railroad.

1. Total length?
2. Where does it start from?
3. How many divisions?
4. What type and class of engines are being used?
5. Will the winter months affect traffic?
6. Does a man's seniority start when he commences on this railroad, or does service on another railroad count?
7. Would there be a chance for an experienced fireman getting a job?
8. For an inexperienced one?
9. Where would one make his application?

This about covers what I want to know."

—WESLEY KING, Collinsville, Quebec.

Reply, by Mr. R. T. Newman:—The chronological history of 1929 is replete with many stirring events. But none brought a greater thrill to Western Canada than a terse little telegram which reached Winnipeg on Good Friday.

It was from H. A. Dixon, Chief Engineer of the Western Region of the Canadian National Rys, and it read:

"Steel reaches Churchill today."

Steel is in to Churchill and the track has been given the first lift of ballast all the way and an additional fifty-four miles had received the final lift of ballast before the working forces were withdrawn at the end of November. Only 100 miles of line have to be brought to standard in 1930 before the Hudson Bay Railway from The Pas to Churchill is turned over to the operating department, and the final work will be rushed during 1930 and the line should be ready for general operation toward the end of summer.

The Hudson Bay Railroad is a part of the Canadian National Railway System, and total length is given as 425 miles.

It starts from The Pas, Man., and ends at Churchill, Man.

At the present time they are using some of their old locomotive equipment on this line, but when road is in full operation, much larger locomotives will be used, and I presume of locomotive equipment some of their large 6100 class will be used.

I suggest you write to the general superintendent C. N. R. Winnipeg, Canada, and make your application, or to Division Supt., The Pas, Man. If they need experienced fireman you should have no trouble getting on; it is not likely that they would take on inexperienced men.

Some few years ago they were only operating

trains over this line every second and fourth Friday, but they contemplate now handling over 800,000 bushels of grain per day, The Hudson Bay Ry. is no longer a supposition; it is an accomplised fact, and with such a road operating it as the Canadian National, with all the latest equipment, they should have no trouble in winter months, and I understand there will be two divisions when in full operation.

Firing Squad

A METHOD of execution so little used by the United States Army that there are no regulations prescribing the exact procedure.

Request:—"When a person is executed before a firing squad, are the rifles loaded with seven blanks and one Service cartridge?

Or just how are they loaded?

In the American Army?

In the Canadian Army?"

—MAX M. HAWES, Bend, Oregon.

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—There are no regulations which prescribe for the United States Army the manner of carrying out an execution by a firing squad. The exact procedure would be a matter for the local commander to determine. As a matter of fact there has not been an execution by a firing squad in the Army for a great many years. There were a number of executions carried out in the Army, both in this country and in the A. E. F. during the World War but they were all for offenses under the civil law—murder, etc.—and the method of execution was hanging.

In an execution by a firing squad it is probable that more than one rifle would be loaded. Possibly all but one would be loaded and no member of the squad could thus be certain that his piece was loaded. Some such system as this has been used in Mexico recently, I believe.

Desert

ONE HAS to keep on the lookout for snakes and cloudbursts in the Arizona Desert.

Request:—"My buddy and myself are planning a trip to the Arizona desert soon, for a rest and camping trip. We will have a motorcycle and sidecar for transportation for ourselves and equipment. We have our equipment selected, but perhaps you will know of something that we have not thought of.

Not being familiar with the conditions in the desert country, we are somewhat at a loss as to where to find a location that will be suitable for a good campsite for a period of about three months. We would like to locate near the head of some stream, which will furnish sufficient water for camping purposes and which will be suitable for drinking. We would like to locate as near Tucson as conditions will permit, though with the motorcycle and sidecar we can thus afford to locate some distance away and still not be too far away from a good source of food supply. However we want to get out away from civilization a bit, where we can be sure of being by ourselves with little likelihood of disturbance, and we are hoping that you will be able to suggest a likely place.

Would appreciate suggestions as to the proper remedies for the treatment of snakebite, and perhaps you can suggest some precautions to be observed, as to the desert in general.

After a few months we expect to seek outdoor employment and would like to know the possibilities of the different kinds of outdoor work, working conditions to expect and wages.

Also would like to know if it ever rains in the desert country."

—W. BEN HARRISON, Los Angeles, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—Finding a decent stream in the desert is some stunt, believe me. Better go into the Catalina Mountains northeast of Tucson, where you can find water, fuel, game and fish. You can look out over desert land from there and after two days and nights on real desert, that will be enough for you, take my word for it.

Buy an outfit to cure bites, permanganate of potash, hypodermic needle, etc.

The best precaution known to me is a keen eye and careful progress, but even then you may get in a pocket. Friend of mine once found that he had walked into a trap after three snakes were rattling from three sides of him and two others were crawling out of holes to take part in the instruction of a tenderfoot. He shot two, made a running long jump past a third and got out alive.

Mines, ranches, cotton fields are about the limit of possible jobs outside in that country and ranches as a rule do not hire men green to the work. They say greenhorns cost more than they earn.

Ever rain on the desert? My soul and body, yes. A cloudburst once chased me three miles down a box cañon on a slow horse and when I reached a place where I could escape, a twelve foot wall of water wet the legs of my horse as he scrambled up a dug chute to get out and a half hour later the bank had been cut away thirty-five feet at a curve near the chute.

I have seen stream beds, hard as a road in dry times, turn to quicksand in a few hours of rain. Rio Puerco has swallowed automobiles whole before now, just that way.

At Gila Bend old men say, "Hard as the hinges of hell in dry time, but will bog a snipe in the wet seasons."

Two wet seasons, midsummer and midwinter.

Desert streams generally run below the surface in dry seasons. I have crossed many a dry stream that was a torrent a month later. I once rode miles on the Hassayampa, dry sand, and seventy days later my side partner wrote me, "Old Hassayamp is on the rampage with five feet of water over the sand we rode on."

Photography

IN THE tropics a good camera and a great deal of patience are necessary, for the photographer's problems include bad water and insects as well as heat and humidity.

Request:—"I shall be going to Para, Brazil, and from there up-country. I am taking along a complete photographic outfit, but as I have not done photographic work in the tropics for a prolonged period of time I would appreciate whatever general and special information you may be willing to part with. I would especially appreciate information as to camera; manner of transporting chemicals; plates and films you would advise, etc. In short, whatever you consider most important in this line of work. I have worked in the tropics before, but used only such precautions as I found to be necessary."

—L. A. ERICHSEN, Quantico, Va.

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—If you are going to do photographic work in the tropics, you will find your worst enemies to be:

1. Heat
2. Humidity
3. Bad water
4. Insects

To dispose first of the camera proposition, I personally believe the best camera for tropical use to be the Adams Minex Tropical Model A. It is a magnificent piece of workmanship, especially built for hard use in bad climates, and I do not believe there is anything better to be had. It is made by A. Adams & Co., Ltd., 24 Charing Cross Road, London, W. C. 2, and the only drawback is the price. However, you can't get a good thing without paying for it. As to size, I would say 3¼"x4¼".

Plates *versus* films. I much prefer the former. They keep better, are more easily handled, and can be had in a non-halation (double coated) form. I realize, though, that on a trip of this sort, the bulk and weight of plates represent a serious disadvantage, so you may find films preferable on that account. I would advise using panchromatic films (or Wratten panchromatic plates, with a *properly corrected* ray filter).

You will find it advantageous to have your plates or films packed in sealed tin boxes; if you want to take the trouble, and use a can-opener every time you load your camera, it will be well to have the boxes soldered; if not, a strip of surgeons' adhesive tape (not electricians') and a rubber band will do the trick. But don't pack more than a day's supply in one box. It is not well to seal them airtight after exposure or development.

You know, of course, that it is advisable to keep all temperatures of developer, fixing bath, and wash-water below 70° Fahrenheit. Try to do it in the tropics! But by using a developer which works with out alkali and taking other precautions, you can get by even at higher temperatures. Amidol is the developer. If you can spend the money, take Burroughs Wellcome's tabloids; if not, take a bottle of anhydrous sodium sulphite and a bottle of amidol, experiment a little before starting, by weighing out the proper amounts (you can find formulae in the B. J. Almanac or in the instruction sheets that come with bromide papers) and then measure your quantities with a celluloid mustard spoon or salt spoon which you will buy at the five-and-ten-cent store. Then you can use the spoon thereafter, and won't have to carry scales.

HAVING developed your plates or films, rinse them a couple of times, then harden them in a 3% solution of chrome alum or a 10% solution of formaldehyde before fixing; rinse once after hardening, and fix. I would use plain hypo, mixing it fresh each time, rather than carry a solution of acid hypo.

But if you carry the hypo in crystal form, see that it is hermetically sealed; it is very deliquescent, and in a damp climate will go liquid while you turn around. And if you mix it fresh, look out for your temperatures; dissolving the hypo chills the water, and a sudden change from warm developer into cold hypo may cause reticulation of the film. Of course, I am assuming throughout that you will use tank development; it would be foolish to do anything else; development by inspection is twenty times the trouble (especially on a trip like yours) and gives no better results.

If you use roll film, the Kodak tank is what you want; if cut film or plates, the Dallan tank. If you use cut film, you will need a dark place to load your holders and to load the films or plates into the tank; with the Dallan tank, all subsequent operation can be conducted in full daylight. However, any room or tent is a dark room at night, or you can have several blankets piled over you as you squat on the ground, if you must do it in the daytime. If you use the blanket trick, tie a cloth around your forehead to keep the perspiration from dripping on the plates or films, and have another handy to dry your hands on; it gets seven times hotter than the sky blue hinges of Gehenna under those blankets! If conditions are extremely bad, you can harden your films before developing, but this will change the development time, so experiment with it before starting.

Humidity will bother you chiefly by making your plates or films dry slowly. I have had plates take four days to dry, whereas at home I have had them dry spontaneously in less than an hour. A current of air of course helps, but remember that a change in drying rate invariably causes different densities in the image in the portions which have dried at different rates, so whatever you do, keep them drying at uniform speed, or at least without any sudden changes of rate; don't get impatient and start fanning them when they're half dry. A plate which has been thoroughly hardened can be dried over a fire, but this isn't advisable with films, on account of the

inflammability of the celluloid base. Still, you can get away with it if you're careful.

Bad water. Generally speaking, any water that's fit to drink is all right for developing, but you may find suspended vegetable matter which will make spots on the plates. Filtering through a fairly close piece of cloth will take this out, and you are not likely to meet any dissolved chemicals which will make trouble.

Insects. When drying plates or films, have a cover of net to put over them. It slows the drying, but keeps the gelatine from being eaten by flies. And it's highly discouraging to find a good negative with holes in it; the little devils sure do love gelatine! The easiest way to wash plates or films is to hang them in a river, or a pond, with about two feet of water under them; they'll wash free of hypo in ten or fifteen minutes, even if the water is still. But you must protect them from fish, which also find gelatine a very delectable addition to their diet.

Navy

THE system of watches aboard a Naval vessel.

Request:—"At what time does the first watch go on, on a Naval vessel, and what are the names (or nicknames) of the different watches?"

—FRED O'BRIEN, Milford, Conn.

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—The watches are as follows:

12:00 Midnight to 4:00 A. M. Midwatch.
4:00 A. M. to 8:00 A. M. Morning Watch.
8:00 A. M. to 12 Noon. Forenoon Watch.
12:00 Noon to 4:00 P. M. Afternoon Watch.
4:00 P. M. to 8:00 P. M. Evening Watch or Dog Watches.
8:00 P. M. to 12 Midnight. First Watch.

These watches, being each of four hours' duration, the six make twenty-four hours. The purpose of the dog watches is as follows: Crews are usually made up in three sections for the purpose of standing watch; this makes four hours on and eight hours off. If they stood watch all the time with three sections and four on and eight off, they would have to be on duty during the same hours all the time. To overcome this and change the hours of the watches, the dog watches were started. The four to eight watch in the evening was split into two watches of two hours each, and named the dog watches, the first dog watch is from four in the afternoon to six, the second dog watch from six in the evening to eight. Some ships dog the watch every day, and some dog them every week, on Saturday. In the one case the watch hours change every day, in the other every week. With the watch dogged every day the watch which comes off at four in the afternoon goes on again at eight night, four hours off. The watch which comes off at six in the evening goes on again at twelve midnight, six hours off. The watch which comes off at eight night, goes on again at four in the morning, eight hours off. We used to call this "all night out and all night in." Dogging the watch once a week causes the same shift in hours on Saturday evening.

12, 4 and 8 are 8 bells. Half past these hours is 1 bell. The bells are arranged in sets of eight each set covering four hours, both day and night. Even numbered bells are even hours, odd numbered bells are half hours.

Boomerang

VERY likely there would soon be a dearth of indiscriminate shooters if bullets had the same remarkable quality as this native Australian weapon.

Request:—"Do any of the natives of New Zealand or Samoa use the boomerang?"—J. H. WEHMEYER, East Chicago, Indiana.

Reply, by Mr. Tom L. Mills:—The boomerang is peculiar to the native of Australia, and it is most remarkable that he, one of the lowest types of aborigines, holds the unique monopoly of the come-back-if-it-misses weapon, which is unknown to the natives of New Zealand and Samoa, who have no weapon similar to it.

The boomerang is made of wood, in the shape of a crooked half circle, after the type of a sickle whittled on its inner side to a blunt knife edge. The natives away out back use the boomerang to bring down birds on the wing, and the boomerang has the peculiar quality that if it misses its object it comes back to the thrower—and if he doesn't watch out it may hit him on the back of the neck. Hence the saying: "It might come back with boomerang effect."

Track

SOME general pointers on running form.

Request:—"Would you be so kind as to tell me the correct posture to assume, and the proper method of moving the legs, for both the sprints and the long distance runs? I am a miler on the track squad of Jamaica High School, but I am not a very good one. As I have reason to believe that I can improve my running I am asking you to send me the correct form."

—PAUL ERNST, Jamaica, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Jackson Scholz:—One of the chief essentials in both the sprints and the distances is the looseness of the runner's muscles. If the muscles of a man's legs are tight, if his hips and knees are stiff, it is impossible for him to develope any real form for any running event.

In a man whose muscles and joints are naturally loose, you are more apt to find the natural runner than in the other type, because he is not restricted in any way by his muscles.

Failing this natural looseness, it can be developed to a surprising extent by certain exercises of the stretching type. For runners I would suggest high

kicking as the most simple and most effective. Practise it several times a day, always remembering to keep the knees stiff.

In running, the athlete should always guard against kicking his heels up behind. That is lost motion, and the leg should be brought directly forward at the end of each stride. The posture in distance running is naturally more upright than in sprinting. The body should be well over the legs, and slightly forward. It is all a matter of comfortable balance which must be adjusted to suit the needs of the individual.

The posture in sprinting is more artificial, because the arms and the legs of the runner should work in the same plane. The body, in sprinting, should be well forward, in order that the force of gravity may be utilized to the utmost. The knees should come up high in front to enable the runner to get as much distance as possible from each stride. The runner, in sprinting, obtains more of a pull with his arms than in the distance runs. The pull should be a direct downward pull from about the height of his head.

THE "Boxing" and "Yachting" sections of *Ask Adventure* are at present vacant. Readers who feel that they are qualified to act as experts on these subjects should state their qualifications in a letter to The Managing Editor, *Adventure*, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

This department also wishes to get in touch with Mr. Sam Frizzell, address unknown, in order to forward a communication from M. Taylor, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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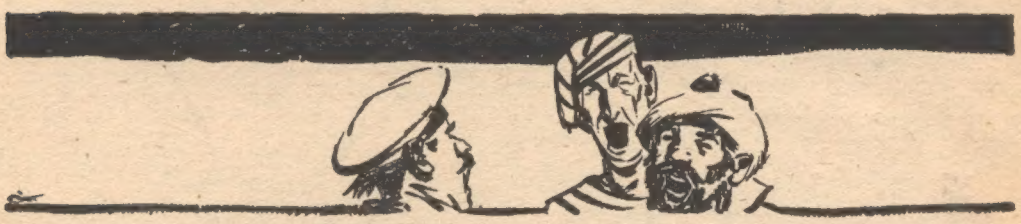

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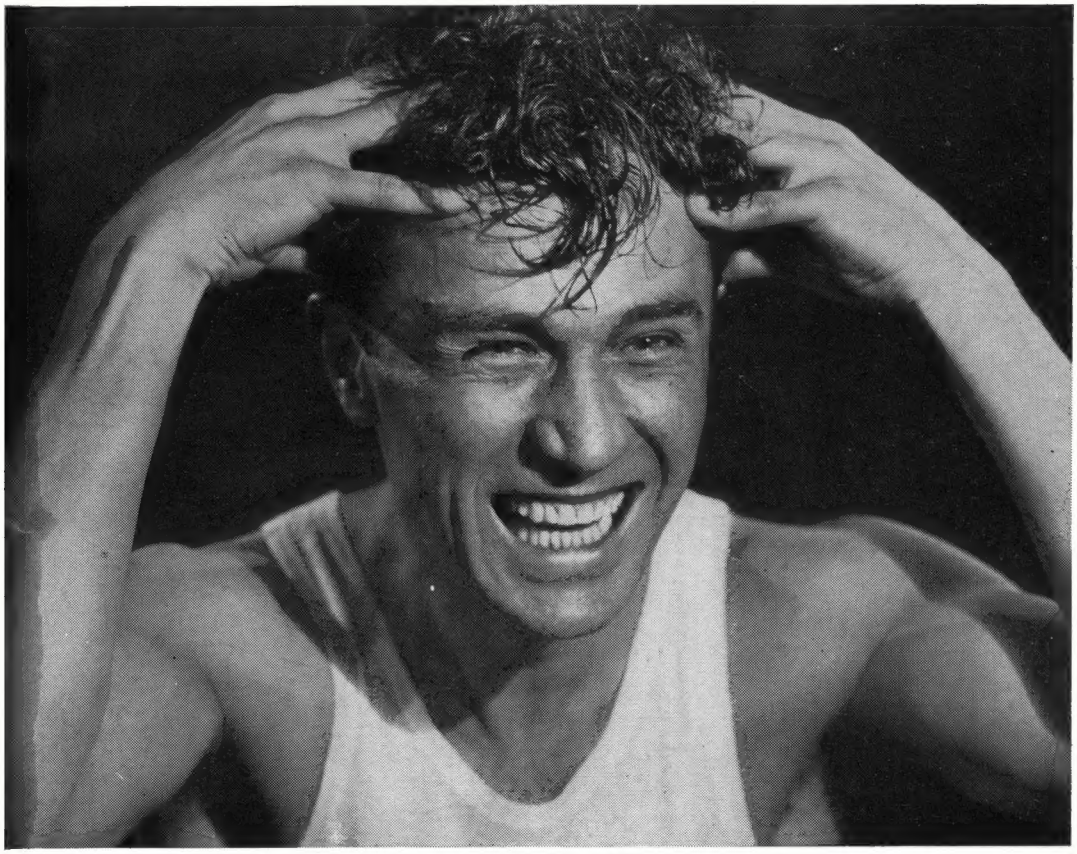

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